THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

JEAN VAN HAMME
TEUN BERSERIK • PETER VAN DONGEN

THE LAST SWORDFISH

9th CINEBOOK
The 9th Art Publisher

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SCRIPT: JEAN VAN HAMME
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The IRA (Irish Republican Army) was first raised in 1919 from members of two armed nationalist groups, the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers, with the goal of throwing off the yoke of English rule, which had been oppressing Ireland since its conquest in the 12th century by Henry Plantagenet.

When, at the end of 1937, Southern Ireland at last became independent and adopted the name Eire, part of the IRA continued to rebel against the partition of the country that saw the six Ulster counties in the north-east remain part of the United Kingdom – which they are to this day. In December 1938, it officially declared war on England, a war that consisted mostly of deadly attacks and bombings on both Ulster and English soil.

During the Second World War, the Republic of Ireland, like Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, and Portugal, remained neutral. Following international conventions, it closed its ports and airports to the warring nations, even though the vast majority of the population was firmly on the Allies' side. In fact, 70,000 Irish volunteers joined the British armed forces.

The IRA, however, continually conspired with the Nazis through the German embassy in Dublin. Dublin, a neutral capital, accommodated embassies of all the belligerents, including Japan, making it a veritable nest of spies crawling with intelligence agents from all sides.

As early as 1940, Admiral Canaris's *Abwehr* (German military intelligence) sent a commando of saboteurs to Ireland that included members of the Brandenburgers, a soon-to-become infamous commando unit. Its goal, with the help of the IRA, was to blow up Buckingham Palace with the entire royal family inside. Fortunately, despite all attempts by IRA agents in London, the plan failed.

Over the course of the war, several German agents and saboteurs were sent to Ireland, with missions ranging from espionage to liaising with the IRA to more sabotage. But the officers of *An Garda Síochána* (the Irish national police service), which had infiltrated the IRA, thwarted them at every turn, arresting them all as well as over 600 IRA members. The most successful such German spy was *Hauptmann* (Captain) Hermann Görtz, who managed to remain at large within Ireland for 18 months after parachuting into the country, but even he was eventually caught and spent the rest of the war in prison.

That's it for history. What follows now is, of course, fiction. We are in a version of January 1948, four years before the death of George VI, father of the future Queen Elizabeth II.

I advise our readers to first read, or reread, the great Jacobs's first 'Blakeandmortimerian' opus – *The Secret of the Swordfish* – as many parts of the present book explicitly refer to its forefather … and also because it's a great story.

I dedicate this book to my dear wife Huguette, as it was her reckless promise to my beloved publisher that led to the writing of its script.

JEAN VAN HAMME

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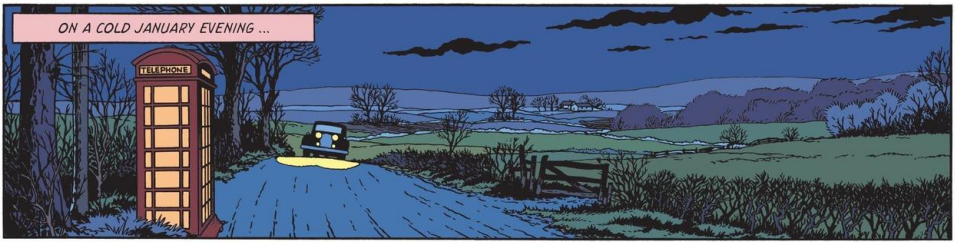
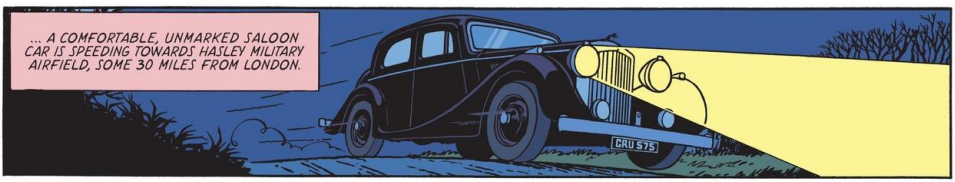
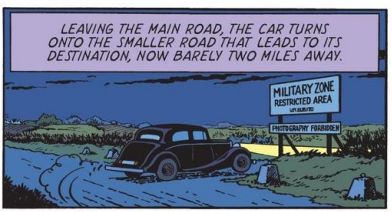

ON A COLD JANUARY EVENING ...
TELEPHONE


... A COMFORTABLE, UNMARKED SALOON CAR IS SPEEDING TOWARDS HASLEY MILITARY AIRFIELD, SOME 30 MILES FROM LONDON.
GRU 575

IT CARRIES MAJOR RUPERT HUMBOLDT, WHO IS TO FLY TO THE MIDDLE EAST THAT VERY NIGHT, ON A SECRET MISSION FOR THE BRITISH WAR OFFICE.


LEAVING THE MAIN ROAD, THE CAR TURNS ONTO THE SMALLER ROAD THAT LEADS TO ITS DESTINATION, NOW BARELY TWO MILES AWAY.
MILITARY ZONE
RESTRICTED AREA
PHOTOGRAPHY FORBIDDEN

WHEN SUDDENLY ...
?!

A checkpoint? Here?! I thought—
Don't think, Sergeant. Just give me your mission orders.

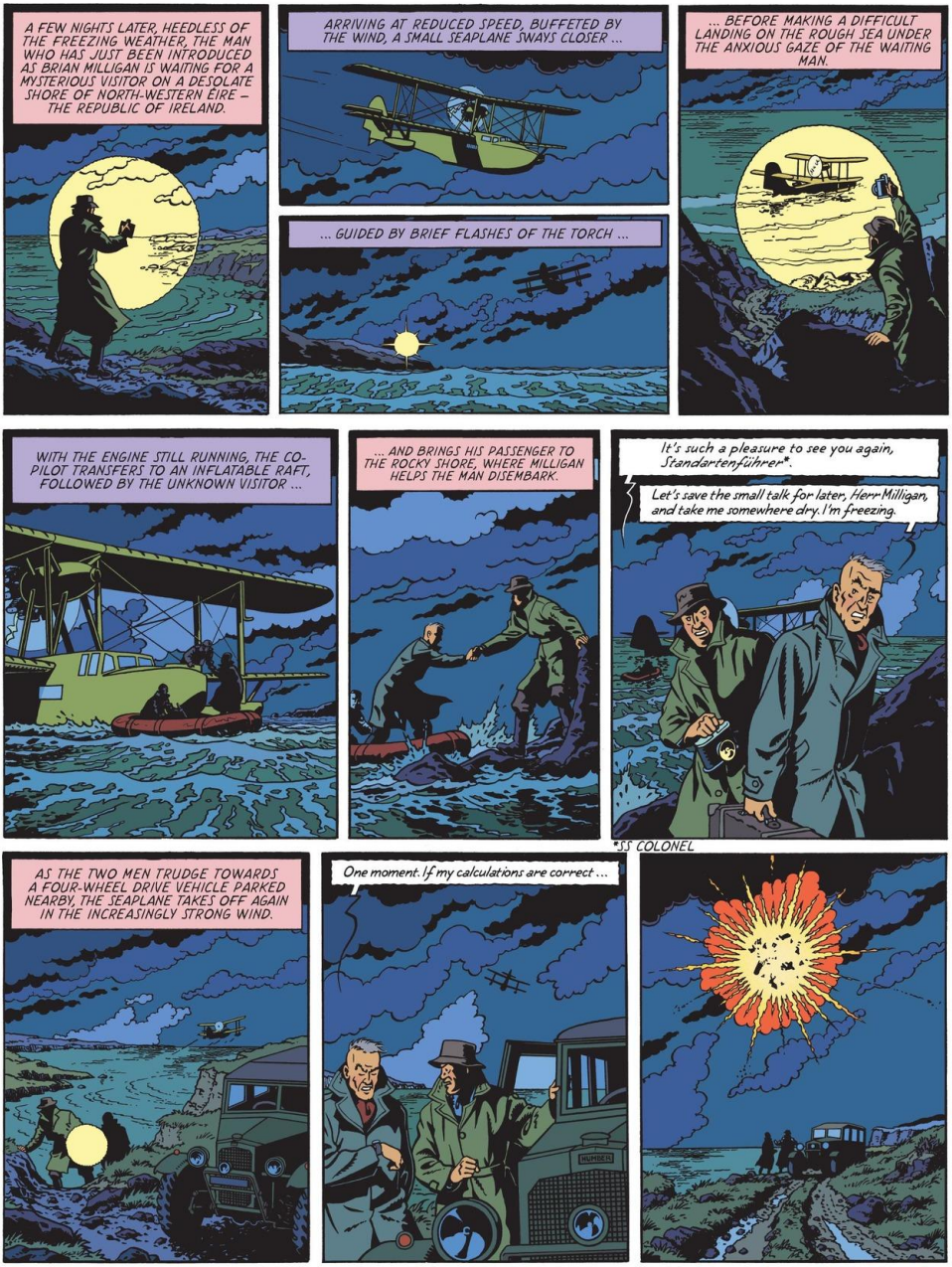
THE UNSUSPECTING SERGEANT HANDS THE REQUESTED DOCUMENT OVER TO THE MILITARY POLICEMAN.
This isn't in order. Get out of the car.
But—
Just a moment!

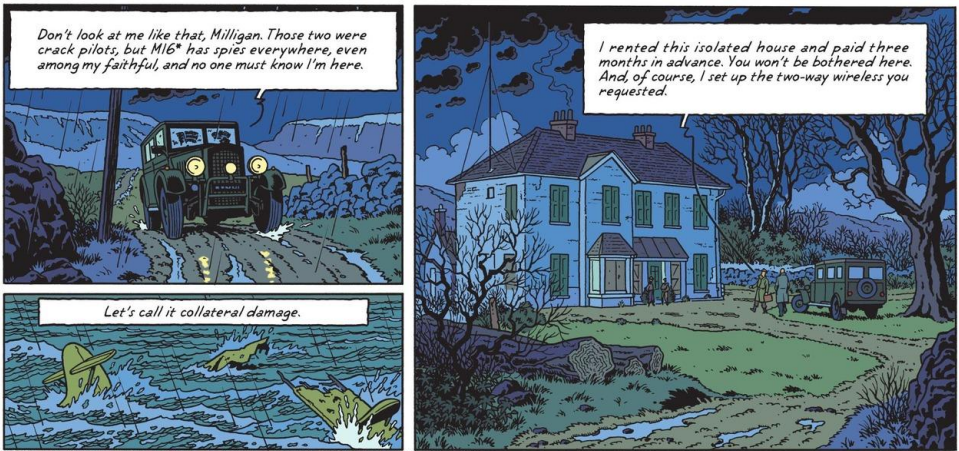
I am Major Humboldt, and I—
I know exactly who you are ...

... you English pig!
BANG
BANG
BANG

Or rather, who you were.

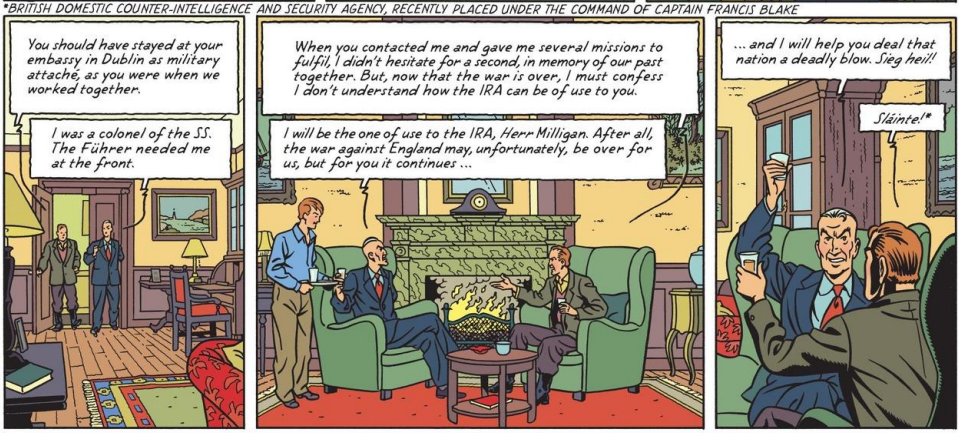
PANICKING, THE DRIVER JUMPS OUT OF THE VEHICLE ...
... BUT THE UNFORTUNATE MAN DOESN'T GET FAR.
TRAA-TRAAA
That was too easy, so it was. Throw the bodies into the lorry ...
... and get rid of them. They must never be found, let alone identified.
Where's our replacement major?
I'm here, Milligan.
It's up to you now, Sir. Even though I don't know all the elements in this game.
No more than I do. We all play our parts.
And well done on the way you played yours, by the way. Perhaps we will meet again, if the game master decides we should.
Let's hope so. Safe journey, 'Major'.
You! Once you've dropped off our major, abandon the car in the East End after erasing all traces and fingerprints. Understood, lad?
Yes, Brian. As you command, Brian.
AND SO, FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, THE POWERFUL CAR AND ITS NEW PASSENGER SUCCESSFULLY PASS THROUGH THE GATES OF THE MILITARY AIRFIELD.
THE FIRST ACT OF THE MOST HORRIFYING PLOT EVER HATCHED AGAINST ENGLAND HAS JUST TAKEN PLACE ...


A FEW NIGHTS LATER, HEEDLESS OF THE FREEZING WEATHER, THE MAN WHO HAS JUST BEEN INTRODUCED AS BRIAN MILLIGAN IS WAITING FOR A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR ON A DESOLATE SHORE OF NORTH-WESTERN ÉIRE – THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND.
ARRIVING AT REDUCED SPEED, BUFFETED BY THE WIND, A SMALL SEAPLANE SWAYS CLOSER ...
... GUIDED BY BRIEF FLASHES OF THE TORCH ...
... BEFORE MAKING A DIFFICULT LANDING ON THE ROUGH SEA UNDER THE ANXIOUS GAZE OF THE WAITING MAN.
WITH THE ENGINE STILL RUNNING, THE CO-PILOT TRANSFERS TO AN INFLATABLE RAFT, FOLLOWED BY THE UNKNOWN VISITOR ...
... AND BRINGS HIS PASSENGER TO THE ROCKY SHORE, WHERE MILLIGAN HELPS THE MAN DISEMBARK.
It's such a pleasure to see you again, Standartenführer*.
Let's save the small talk for later, Herr Milligan, and take me somewhere dry. I'm freezing.
*SS COLONEL
AS THE TWO MEN TRUDGE TOWARDS A FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE VEHICLE PARKED NEARBY, THE SEAPLANE TAKES OFF AGAIN IN THE INCREASINGLY STRONG WIND.
One moment. If my calculations are correct ...
HUMBER



*FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE SERVICE OF THE UK, LED BY COMMANDER WILLIAM STEELE

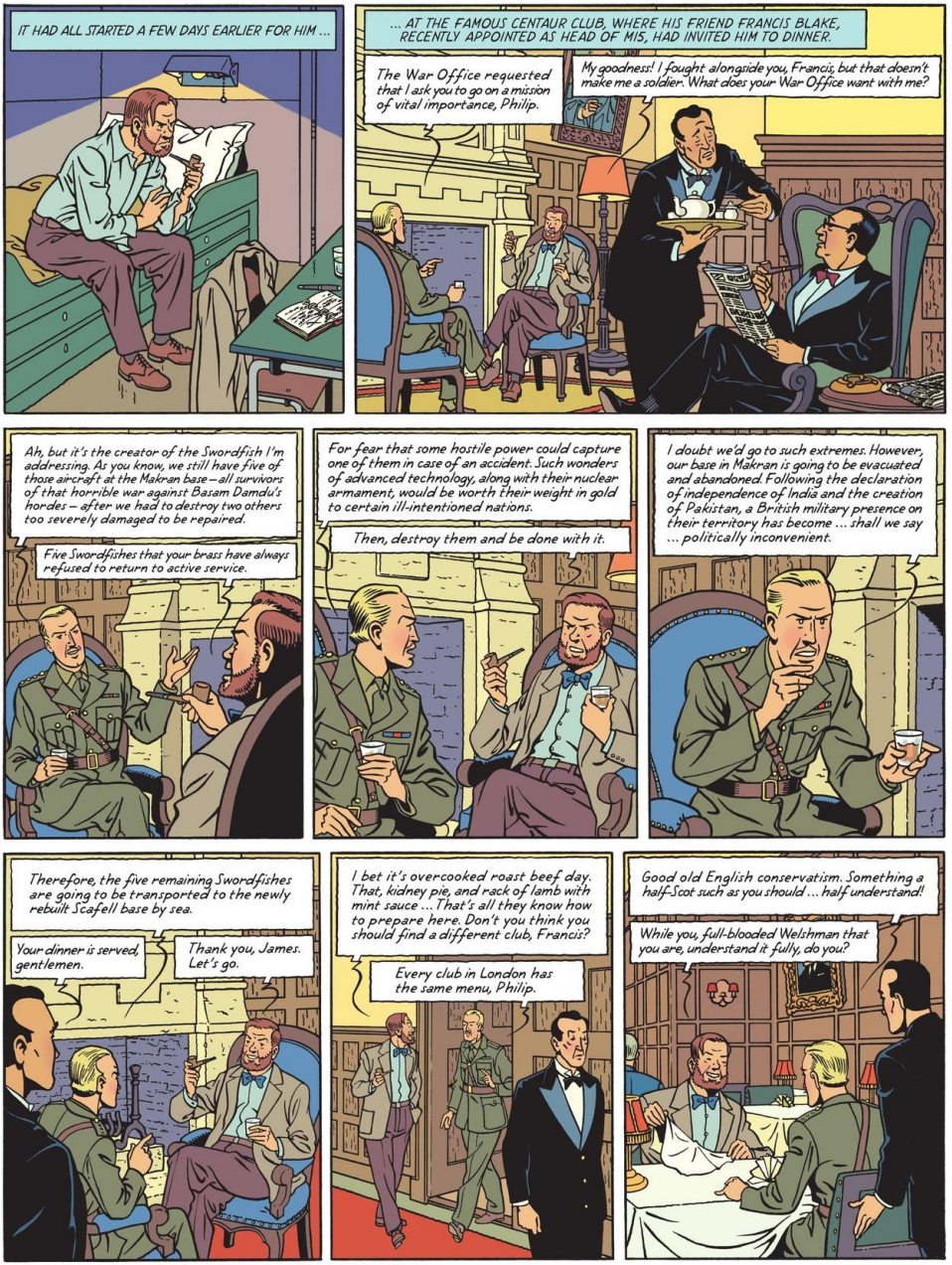
*BRITISH DOMESTIC COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY AGENCY, RECENTLY PLACED UNDER THE COMMAND OF CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE

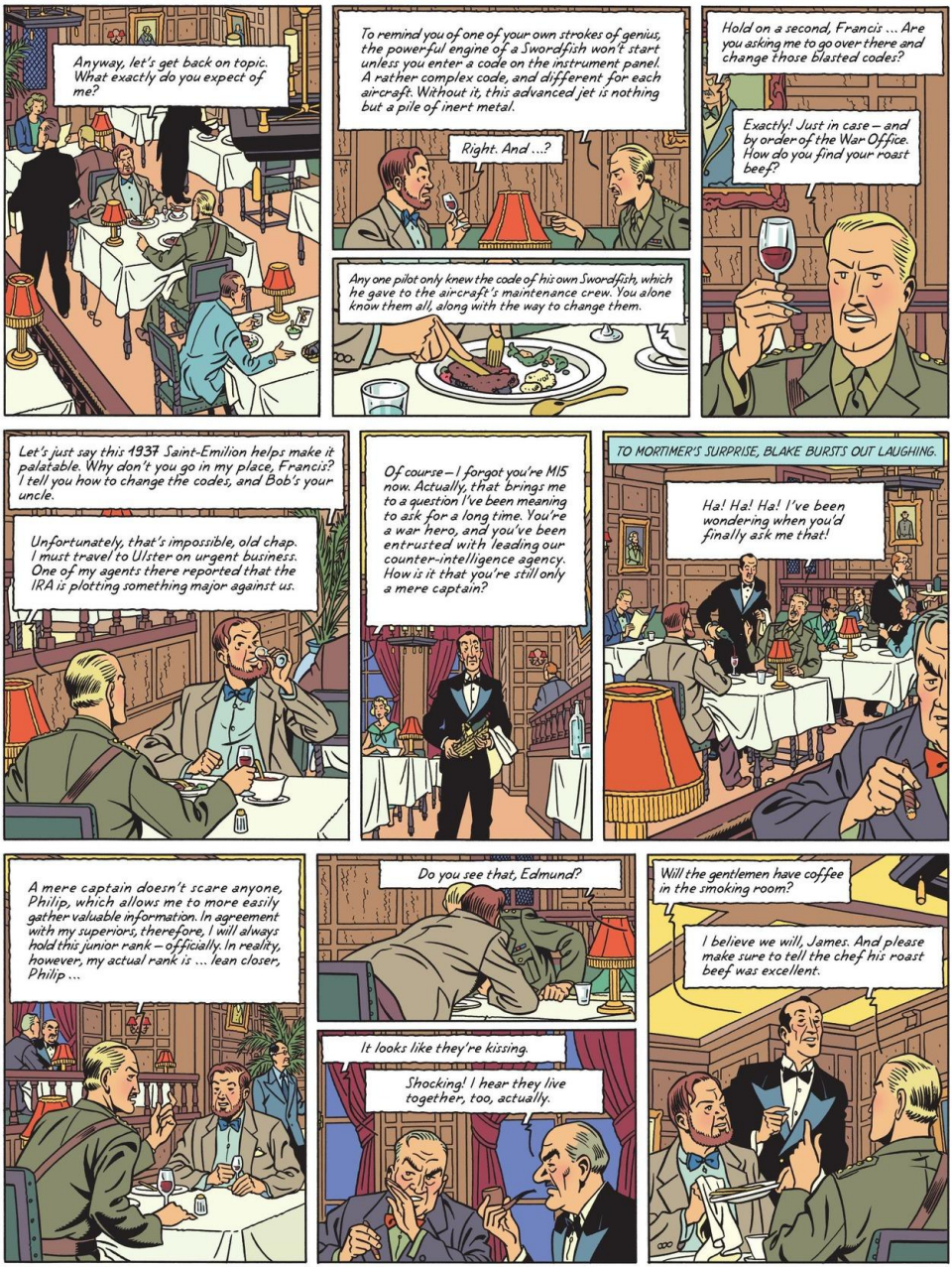


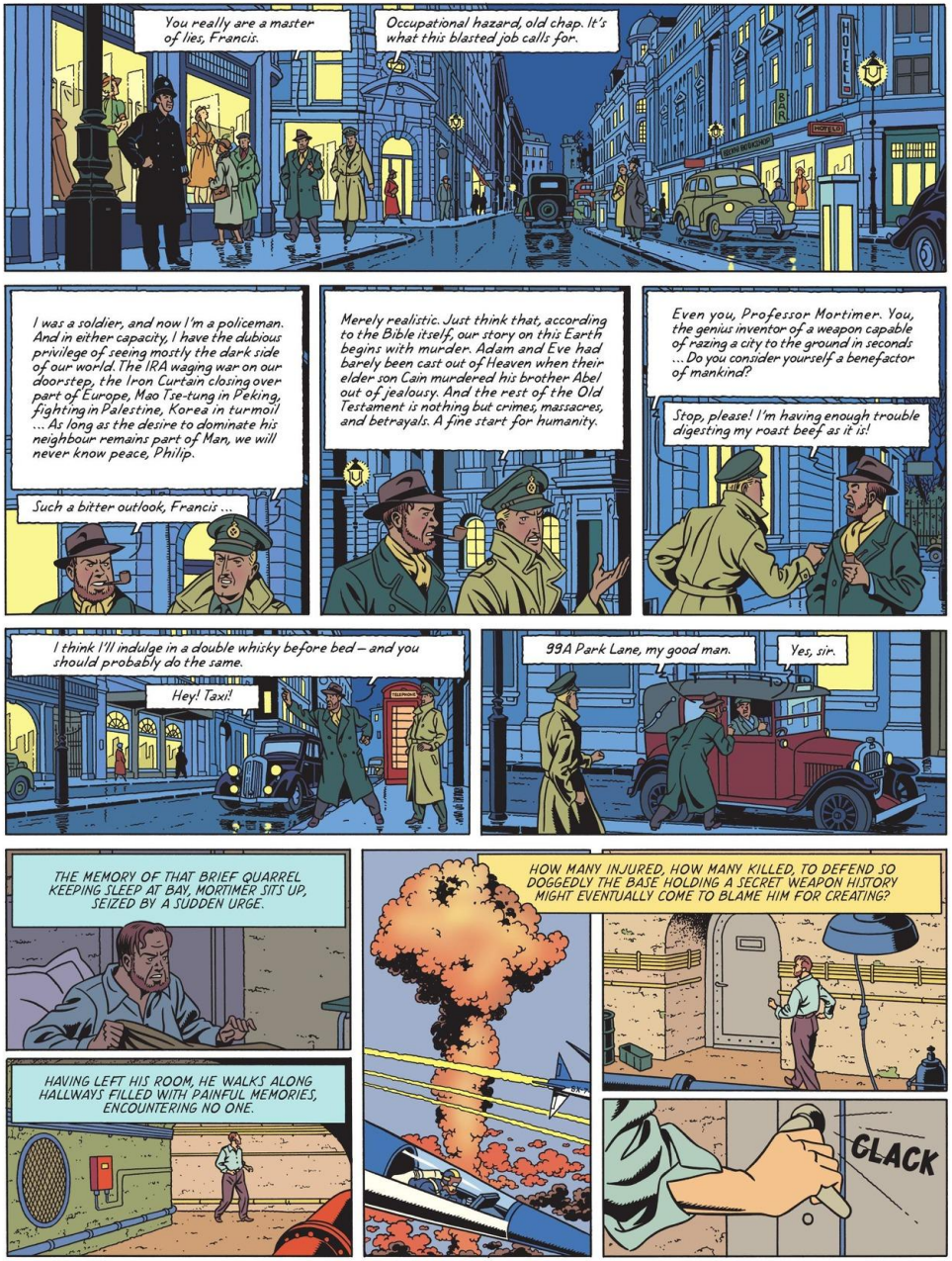
*'HEALTH' IN GAELIC – A TOAST

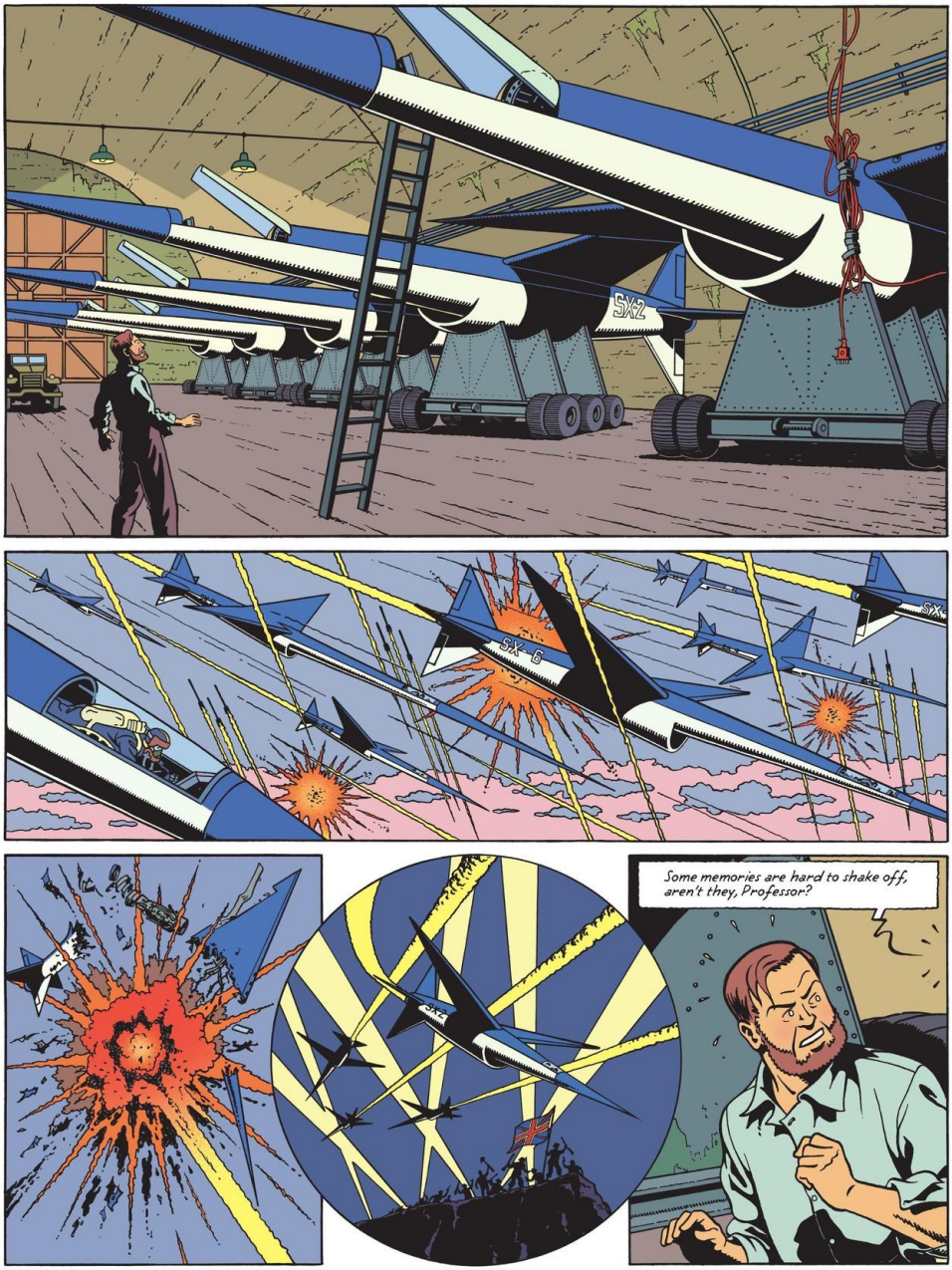
Before our shameful defeat in May '45, the Führer had entrusted me with hiding some of our war chest. Since I'm the only one left today who knows where it is, it remains available to me. And, when my friend Sturmbannführer Hermann Gross joined me in Paraguay last year after being released from his prison camp, I immediately knew to what use I must put some of that fortune.
And that is ...?
Hermann was the head of the Brandenburg Division. The Abwehr had tasked them with Operation Buckingham. Have you heard of it?
My predecessor at the head of the IRA, Frank Ryan, told me about it. The goal was to blow up Buckingham Palace with explosives made of nitrocellulose. But the project failed despite all our efforts.
That's precisely the operation we are going to resume, Herr Milligan. Turning Buckingham Palace and everyone inside it to ashes. I even have a date for you: the twenty-first of March.
How, though? Smuggling in enough explosives turned out to be impossible. And if you're thinking of an air raid, the new English radars will detect you the moment you enter their air space.
*SS MAJOR
As for your V2s, assuming you have any left, you know as well as I do they can't seem to hit their programmed targets. So ...?
Times have changed, my friend. The English themselves will be providing the weapon we need, thanks to the man who replaced the major you so efficiently eliminated at my request.
I see. Or, to put it another way, I don't actually see a thing ... But I suppose you'll explain further when the time comes. One last question, though. Why the twenty-first of March? Is it Adolf Hitler's birthday, maybe?
You'll know soon. Anyway, I'm exhausted after that trip. I'm going to bed.
AT THAT MOMENT, OVER 3,000 MILES FURTHER EAST, THE SUN IS ALREADY UP.
I'd wager you recognise this place, Professor ...?
The Makran Pyramid! It wasn't so long ago that I spent some unpleasant moments here.

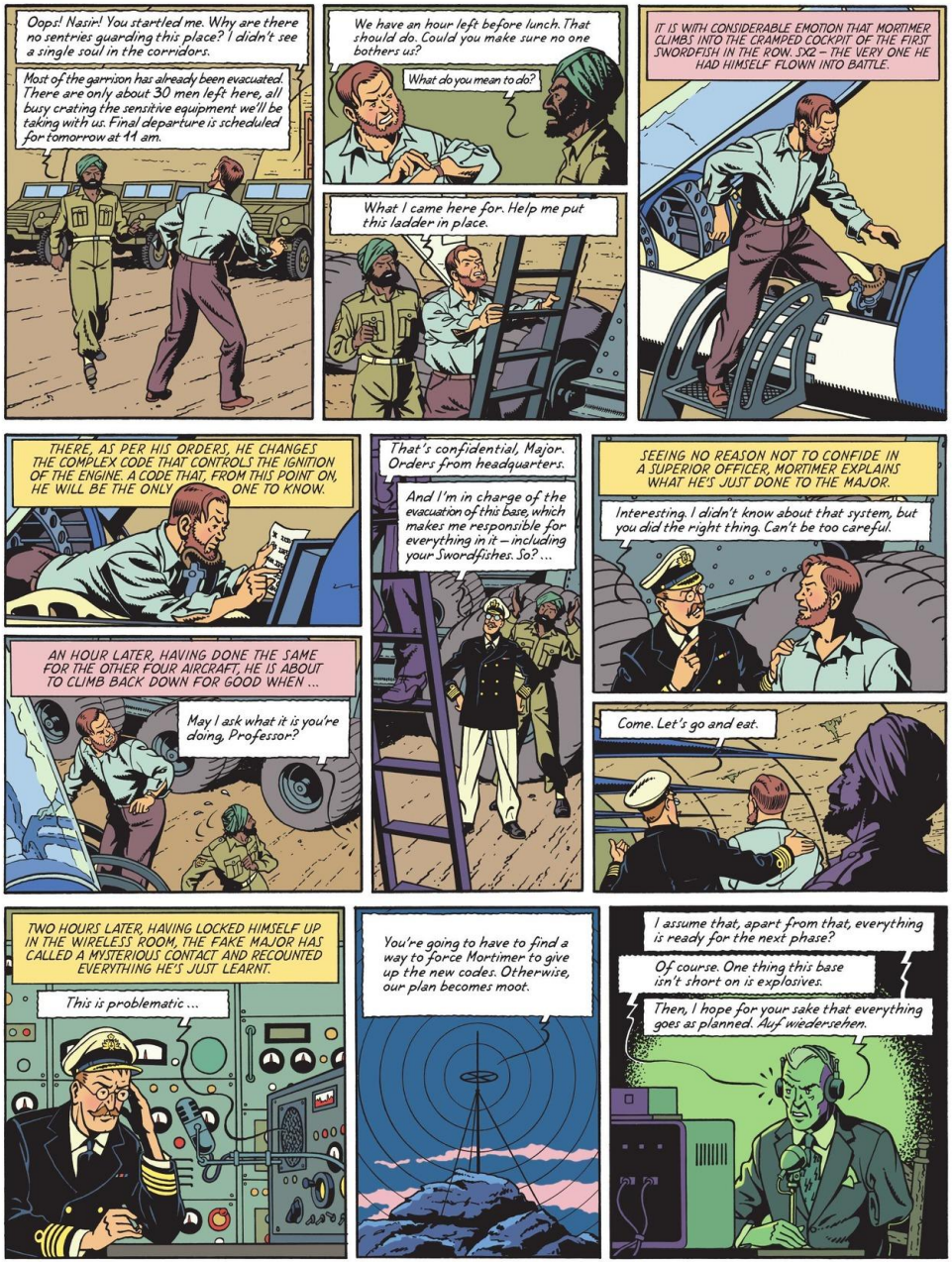
We had no idea our secret base was so close back then.
Which those cursed Imperials unfortunately found out, thanks to that traitorous Olrik.*
How long have you known how to fly a helicopter?
I got my licence three months ago. One of the officers here is an instructor.
After our ordeal in China, I was assigned to Makran as quartermaster. And since there's precious little left to do around here aside from going to the market, I thought I might as well learn how to fly this. Just in case.
*SEE THE SECRET OF THE SWORDFISH.
I see we no longer have to traipse through rocks to go in.
We still call it a secret base, but the truth is that the whole world knows about it now.
Major Rupert Humboldt. Welcome to Makran, Professor. I imagine you must be tired after such a long trip?
I must confess, a nice pipe and a few hours of rest wouldn't come amiss.
As you probably know, I've been put in charge of this base's evacuation. I suppose you're here to make sure I don't scratch the paint on your precious Swordfishes during transport?
More or less, yes.
They could have spared you an inconvenient trip – obviously, I will take extremely good care of them. Oh, well, you're here now ... Sergeant Nasir will take you to your room. I'll see you at lunch.
FOLLOWING NASIR THROUGH THE FAMILIAR SIGHTS ...
BOOBY TRAPS
... MORTIMER IS SUDDENLY OVERWHELMED BY THE MEMORIES RUSHING BACK TO HIM. THE STACCATO OF MACHINE GUNS ... THE CRIES OF THE WOUNDED ... THE SMELL OF SMOKE AND GUNPOWDER ...


IT HAD ALL STARTED A FEW DAYS EARLIER FOR HIM ...
... AT THE FAMOUS CENTAUR CLUB, WHERE HIS FRIEND FRANCIS BLAKE, RECENTLY APPOINTED AS HEAD OF MI5, HAD INVITED HIM TO DINNER.
The War Office requested that I ask you to go on a mission of vital importance, Philip.
My goodness! I fought alongside you, Francis, but that doesn't make me a soldier. What does your War Office want with me?
Ah, but it's the creator of the Swordfish I'm addressing. As you know, we still have five of those aircraft at the Makran base – all survivors of that horrible war against Basam Damdu's hordes – after we had to destroy two others too severely damaged to be repaired.
Five Swordfishes that your brass have always refused to return to active service.
For fear that some hostile power could capture one of them in case of an accident. Such wonders of advanced technology, along with their nuclear armament, would be worth their weight in gold to certain ill-intentioned nations.
Then, destroy them and be done with it.
I doubt we'd go to such extremes. However, our base in Makran is going to be evacuated and abandoned. Following the declaration of independence of India and the creation of Pakistan, a British military presence on their territory has become ... shall we say ... politically inconvenient.
Therefore, the five remaining Swordfishes are going to be transported to the newly rebuilt Scafell base by sea.
Your dinner is served, gentlemen.
Thank you, James. Let's go.
I bet it's overcooked roast beef day. That, kidney pie, and rack of lamb with mint sauce ... That's all they know how to prepare here. Don't you think you should find a different club, Francis?
Every club in London has the same menu, Philip.
Good old English conservatism. Something a half-Scot such as you should ... half understand!
While you, full-blooded Welshman that you are, understand it fully, do you?


Anyway, let's get back on topic. What exactly do you expect of me?
To remind you of one of your own strokes of genius, the powerful engine of a Swordfish won't start unless you enter a code on the instrument panel. A rather complex code, and different for each aircraft. Without it, this advanced jet is nothing but a pile of inert metal.
Right. And ...?
Any one pilot only knew the code of his own Swordfish, which he gave to the aircraft's maintenance crew. You alone know them all, along with the way to change them.
Hold on a second, Francis ... Are you asking me to go over there and change those blasted codes?
Exactly! Just in case – and by order of the War Office. How do you find your roast beef?
Let's just say this 1937 Saint-Emilion helps make it palatable. Why don't you go in my place, Francis? I tell you how to change the codes, and Bob's your uncle.
Unfortunately, that's impossible, old chap. I must travel to Ulster on urgent business. One of my agents there reported that the IRA is plotting something major against us.
Of course – I forgot you're MI5 now. Actually, that brings me to a question I've been meaning to ask for a long time. You're a war hero, and you've been entrusted with leading our counter-intelligence agency. How is it that you're still only a mere captain?
TO MORTIMER'S SURPRISE, BLAKE BURSTS OUT LAUGHING.
Ha! Ha! Ha! I've been wondering when you'd finally ask me that!
A mere captain doesn't scare anyone, Philip, which allows me to more easily gather valuable information. In agreement with my superiors, therefore, I will always hold this junior rank – officially. In reality, however, my actual rank is ... lean closer, Philip ...
Do you see that, Edmund?
It looks like they're kissing.
Shocking! I hear they live together, too, actually.
Will the gentlemen have coffee in the smoking room?
I believe we will, James. And please make sure to tell the chef his roast beef was excellent.


You really are a master of lies, Francis.
Occupational hazard, old chap. It's what this blasted job calls for.
HOTEL
I was a soldier, and now I'm a policeman. And in either capacity, I have the dubious privilege of seeing mostly the dark side of our world. The IRA waging war on our doorstep, the Iron Curtain closing over part of Europe, Mao Tse-tung in Peking, fighting in Palestine, Korea in turmoil ... As long as the desire to dominate his neighbour remains part of Man, we will never know peace, Philip.
Such a bitter outlook, Francis ...
Merely realistic. Just think that, according to the Bible itself, our story on this Earth begins with murder. Adam and Eve had barely been cast out of Heaven when their elder son Cain murdered his brother Abel out of jealousy. And the rest of the Old Testament is nothing but crimes, massacres, and betrayals. A fine start for humanity.
Even you, Professor Mortimer. You, the genius inventor of a weapon capable of razing a city to the ground in seconds ... Do you consider yourself a benefactor of mankind?
Stop, please! I'm having enough trouble digesting my roast beef as it is!
I think I'll indulge in a double whisky before bed – and you should probably do the same.
Hey! Taxi!
TELEPHONE
99A Park Lane, my good man.
Yes, sir.
THE MEMORY OF THAT BRIEF QUARREL KEEPING SLEEP AT BAY, MORTIMER SITS UP, SEIZED BY A SUDDEN URGE.
HOW MANY INJURED, HOW MANY KILLED, TO DEFEND SO DOGGEDLY THE BASE HOLDING A SECRET WEAPON HISTORY MIGHT EVENTUALLY COME TO BLAME HIM FOR CREATING?
HAVING LEFT HIS ROOM, HE WALKS ALONG HALLWAYS FILLED WITH PAINFUL MEMORIES, ENCOUNTERING NO ONE.
CLACK

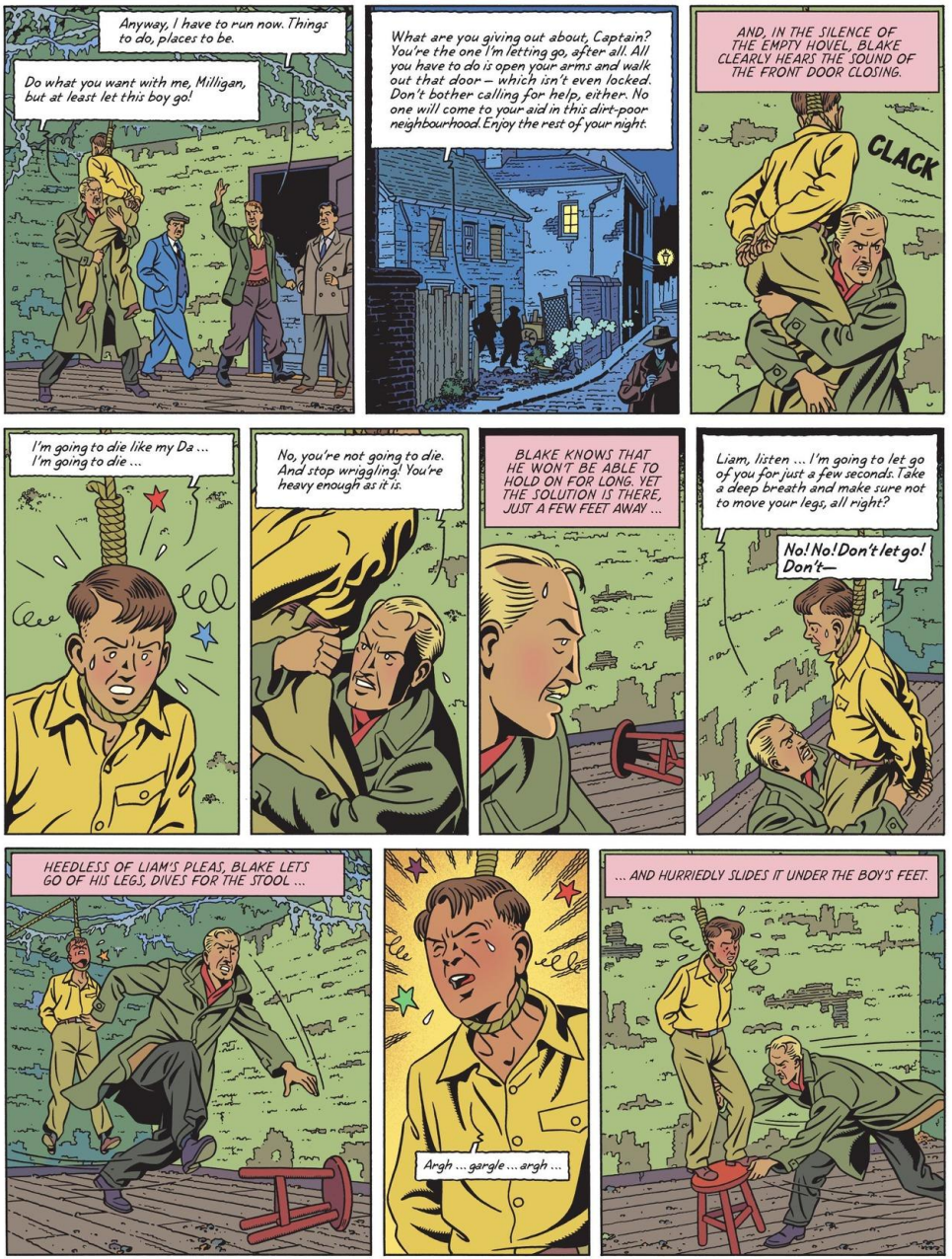

SX2
SX-6
SX
Some memories are hard to shake off, aren't they, Professor?

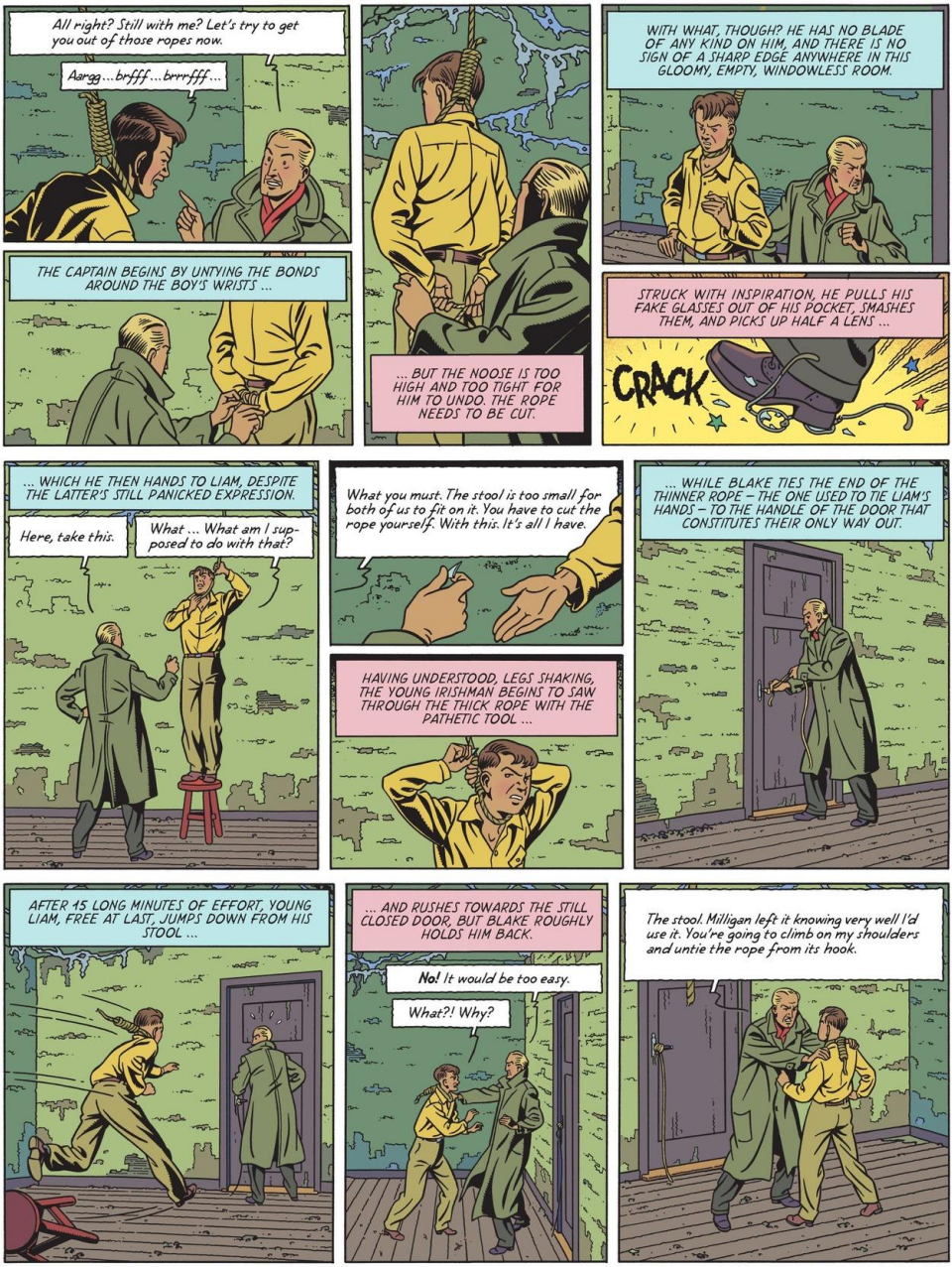

Oops! Nasir! You startled me. Why are there no sentries guarding this place? I didn't see a single soul in the corridors.
Most of the garrison has already been evacuated. There are only about 30 men left here, all busy crating the sensitive equipment we'll be taking with us. Final departure is scheduled for tomorrow at 11 am.
We have an hour left before lunch. That should do. Could you make sure no one bothers us?
What do you mean to do?
What I came here for. Help me put this ladder in place.
IT IS WITH CONSIDERABLE EMOTION THAT MORTIMER CLIMBS INTO THE CRAMPED COCKPIT OF THE FIRST SWORDFISH IN THE ROW. SX2 – THE VERY ONE HE HAD HIMSELF FLOWN INTO BATTLE.
THERE, AS PER HIS ORDERS, HE CHANGES THE COMPLEX CODE THAT CONTROLS THE IGNITION OF THE ENGINE. A CODE THAT, FROM THIS POINT ON, HE WILL BE THE ONLY ONE TO KNOW.
That's confidential, Major. Orders from headquarters.
And I'm in charge of the evacuation of this base, which makes me responsible for everything in it – including your Swordfishes. So? ...
SEEING NO REASON NOT TO CONFIDE IN A SUPERIOR OFFICER, MORTIMER EXPLAINS WHAT HE'S JUST DONE TO THE MAJOR.
Interesting. I didn't know about that system, but you did the right thing. Can't be too careful.
AN HOUR LATER, HAVING DONE THE SAME FOR THE OTHER FOUR AIRCRAFT, HE IS ABOUT TO CLIMB BACK DOWN FOR GOOD WHEN ...
May I ask what it is you're doing, Professor?'
Come. Let's go and eat.
TWO HOURS LATER, HAVING LOCKED HIMSELF UP IN THE WIRELESS ROOM, THE FAKE MAJOR HAS CALLED A MYSTERIOUS CONTACT AND RECOUNTED EVERYTHING HE'S JUST LEARNT.
This is problematic ...
You're going to have to find a way to force Mortimer to give up the new codes. Otherwise, our plan becomes moot.
I assume that, apart from that, everything is ready for the next phase?
Of course. One thing this base isn't short on is explosives.
Then, I hope for your sake that everything goes as planned. Auf wiedersehen.

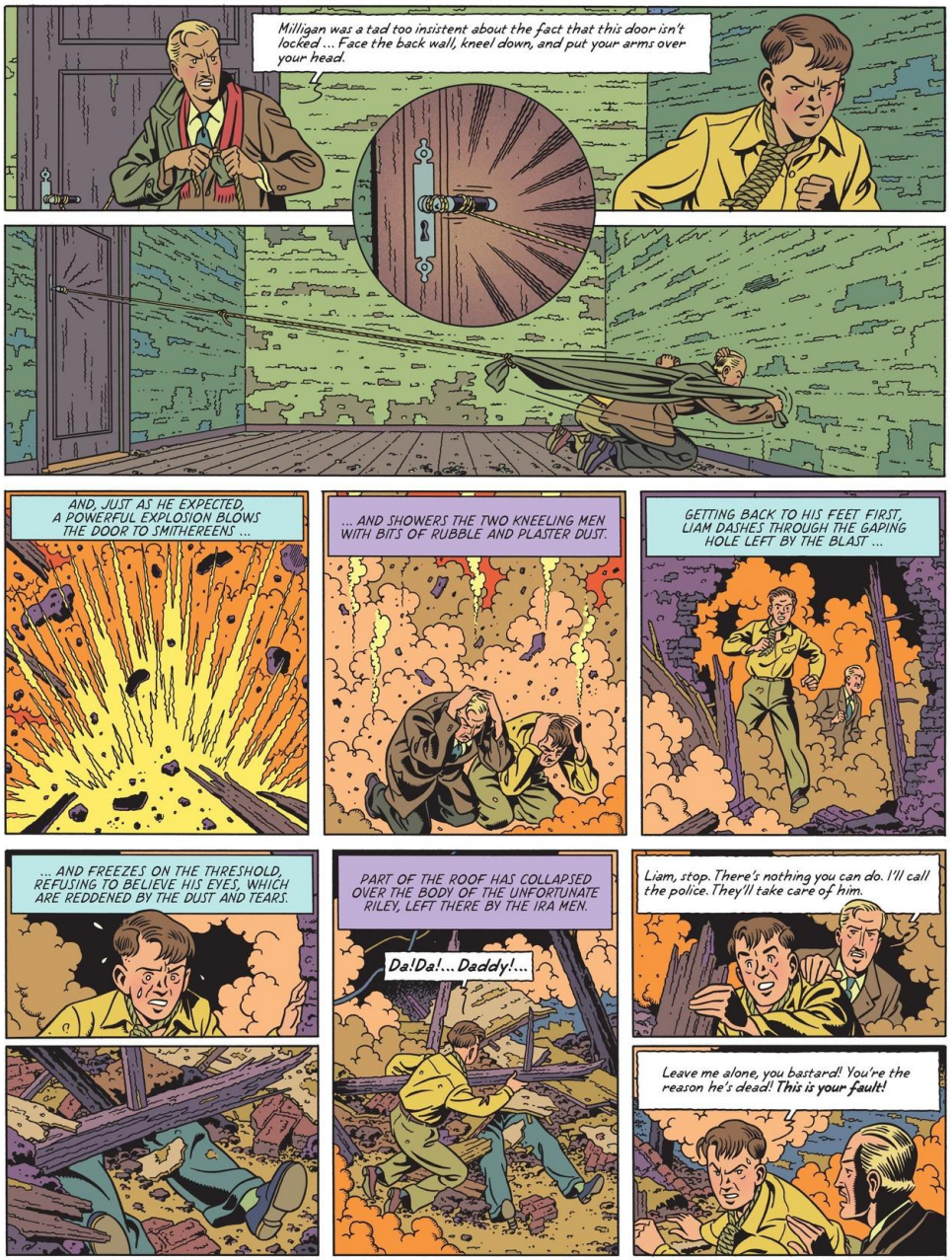
MEANWHILE, SITTING IN A SMOKY PUB IN BELFAST, CAPITAL OF ULSTER, THE CURSORILY DISGUISED CAPTAIN BLAKE IS WAITING TO MEET ONE OF HIS AGENTS, UNDERCOVER IN THE IRA.
Another pint, milord?
Uh ... No, thanks.
THE WAITRESS PULLS A SMALL NOTE FROM HER AMPLE BOSOM ... AND THROWS IT ONTO BLAKE'S TABLE.
You should have one, all the same ...
... because I won't be off for another two hours.
R FOR RILEY, THE NAME OF HIS AGENT – AND HIS HANDWRITING. ALL THAT'S LEFT FOR BLAKE IS TO RESIGN HIMSELF TO WAITING AND SIP HIS SECOND BEER.
DISCONCERTED, BLAKE READS THE CURT NOTE SMELLING OF CHEAP PERFUME.
Impossible to come now.
Follow the waitress.
R.
UNTIL TWO HOURS LATER WHEN, HAVING USHERED HER LAST PATRONS OUT, THE WAITRESS CLOSES THE PUB'S ROLLER SHUTTERS ...
THE PLOUGH
... THEN, WITHOUT A GLANCE AT THE CAPTAIN FOLLOWING HER, WALKS AWAY DOWN THE EMPTY STREET.
FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, HAVING ARRIVED IN A POOR NEIGHBOURHOOD, THE STOUT WOMAN POINTS HER FINGER AT AN ISOLATED HOVEL ...
... BEFORE VANISHING IN THE SHADOWS.

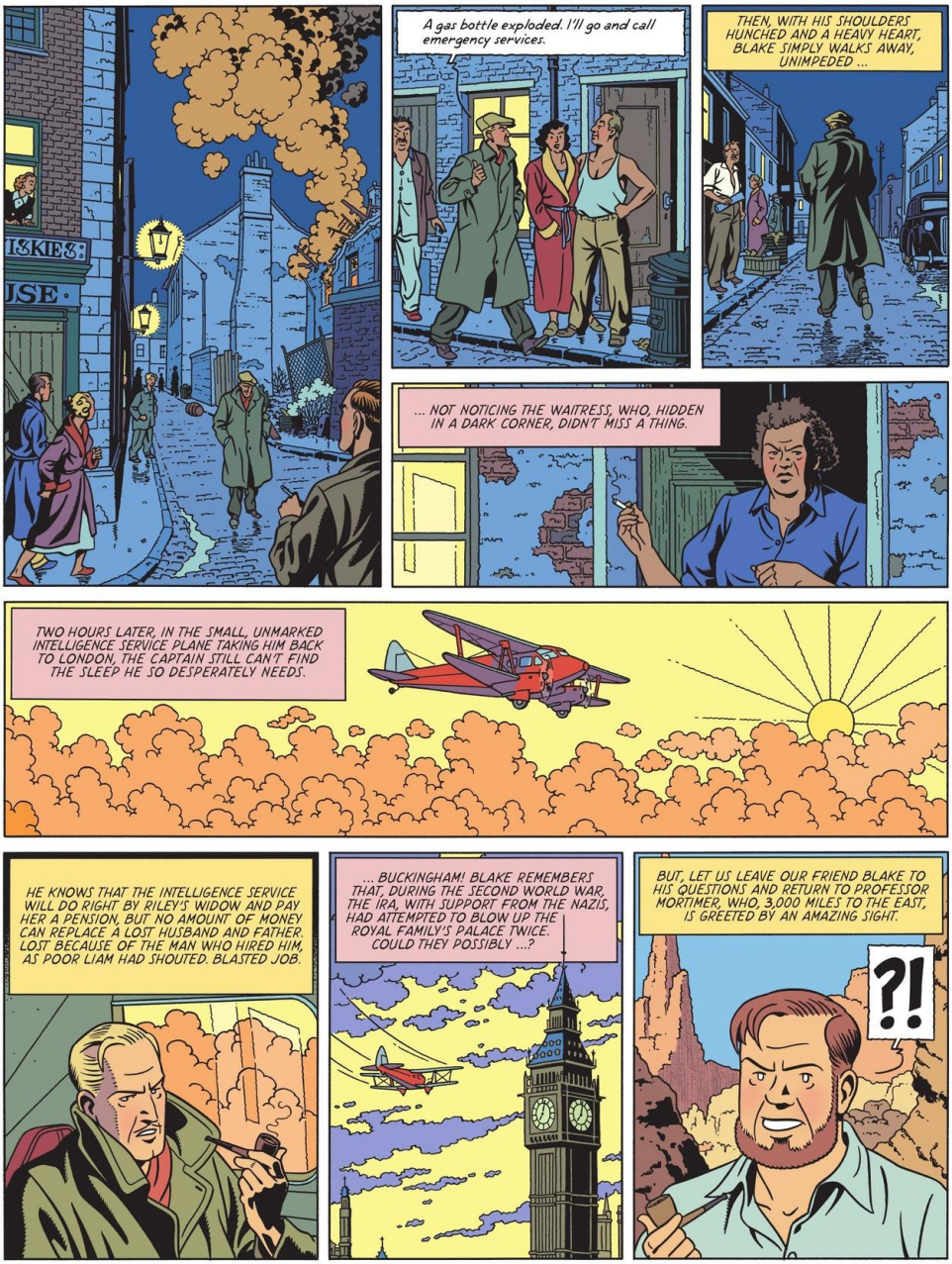
FEARING A POTENTIAL TRAP, BLAKE HAS PULLED OUT HIS SERVICE WEAPON ...
... BEFORE KNOCKING ON THE WORM-EATEN FRONT DOOR ...
KNOCK KNOCK
... WHICH OPENS WITH A CREAK, REVEALING A FACE THE CAPTAIN RECOGNISES IMMEDIATELY.
Come in quick, Captain. This neighbourhood's not safe.
HAVING IDENTIFIED HIS AGENT, BLAKE PUTS HIS PISTOL AND GLASSES AWAY IN THE POCKETS OF HIS TRENCH COAT AND CONFIDENTLY ENTERS THE DILAPIDATED HOUSE ...
... BUT BEFORE HE'S TAKEN TWO STEPS, HE'S KNOCKED OUT BY A BLOW FROM BEHIND WITH A COSH.
Ow...
COMING TO PAINFULLY, BLAKE THINKS HE RECOGNISES THE FACE LEANING OVER HIM.
Brian Milligan! The commander of the IRA himself! What an honour!
And for me, too! It's not every day you get to capture the head of MI5.
Isn't that right, Captain Francis Blake? Don't bother looking for your gun. I'm holding it right now.
All right, Milligan. You win this round. Where's Riley?
That traitor is behind you and living his last moments on Earth.
They made me, Captain. They... They took my son, Liam ... He's only 17, and—
!
You talk too much, Riley. And, unfortunately for you, to the wrong people.
BANG

You miserable lowlife! A defenceless man!
The patriots you lock up in your prisons without a trial are defenceless too, Captain Blake.
Cap ... Captain ...
Buckingham ... They want to—
BANG
Like I said – he talked too much ... What did he say?
His son. He asked me to protect his son! What did you do with him?
Oh, he's in the next room. Would you like to see him?
Those gunshots ... My father! ... You killed my father! ... You're nothing but criminals! Murderers! Scum!
Tsk tsk ... He talks too much too ... Must run in the family.
Let him go, Milligan. That kid has nothing to do with any of our business. He's innocent. And an Irishman like you.
Then he'll be buried in an Irish graveyard. Just like his dear da.
?
AAAAAAAH...
Superb reflexes, Captain. I can see you're in excellent shape. Let's see how long you can hang on ... before he hangs.

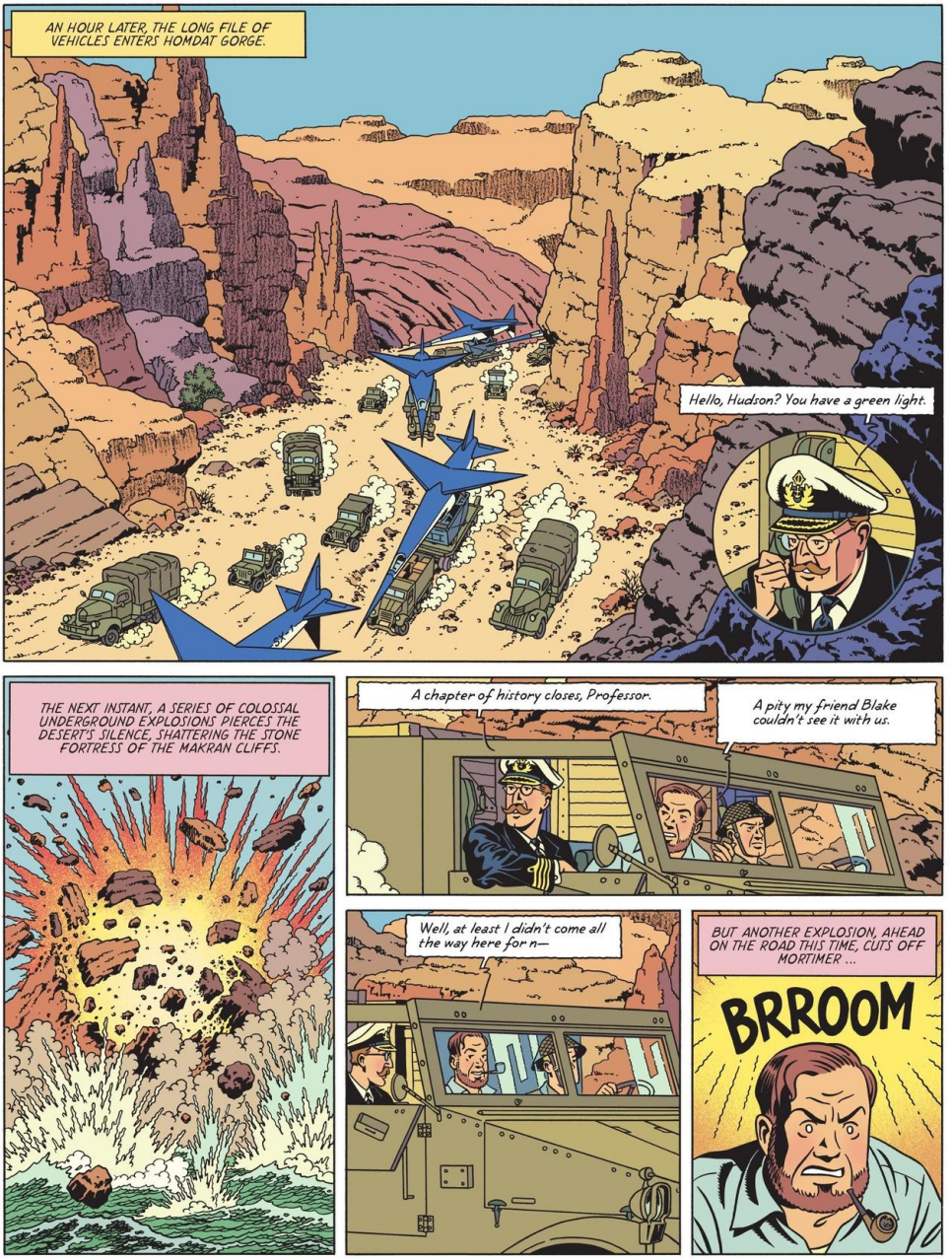

Anyway, I have to run now. Things to do, places to be.
Do what you want with me, Milligan, but at least let this boy go!
What are you giving out about, Captain? You're the one I'm letting go, after all. All you have to do is open your arms and walk out that door — which isn't even locked. Don't bother calling for help, either. No one will come to your aid in this dirt-poor neighbourhood. Enjoy the rest of your night.
AND, IN THE SILENCE OF THE EMPTY HOVEL, BLAKE CLEARLY HEARS THE SOUND OF THE FRONT DOOR CLOSING.
CLACK
I'm going to die like my Da ... I'm going to die ...
No, you're not going to die. And stop wriggling! You're heavy enough as it is.
BLAKE KNOWS THAT HE WON'T BE ABLE TO HOLD ON FOR LONG. YET THE SOLUTION IS THERE, JUST A FEW FEET AWAY ...
Liam, listen ... I'm going to let go of you for just a few seconds. Take a deep breath and make sure not to move your legs, all right?
No! No! Don't let go! Don't—
HEEDLESS OF LIAM'S PLEAS, BLAKE LETS GO OF HIS LEGS, DIVES FOR THE STOOL ...
Argh ... gargle ... argh ...
... AND HURRIEDLY SLIDES IT UNDER THE BOY'S FEET.

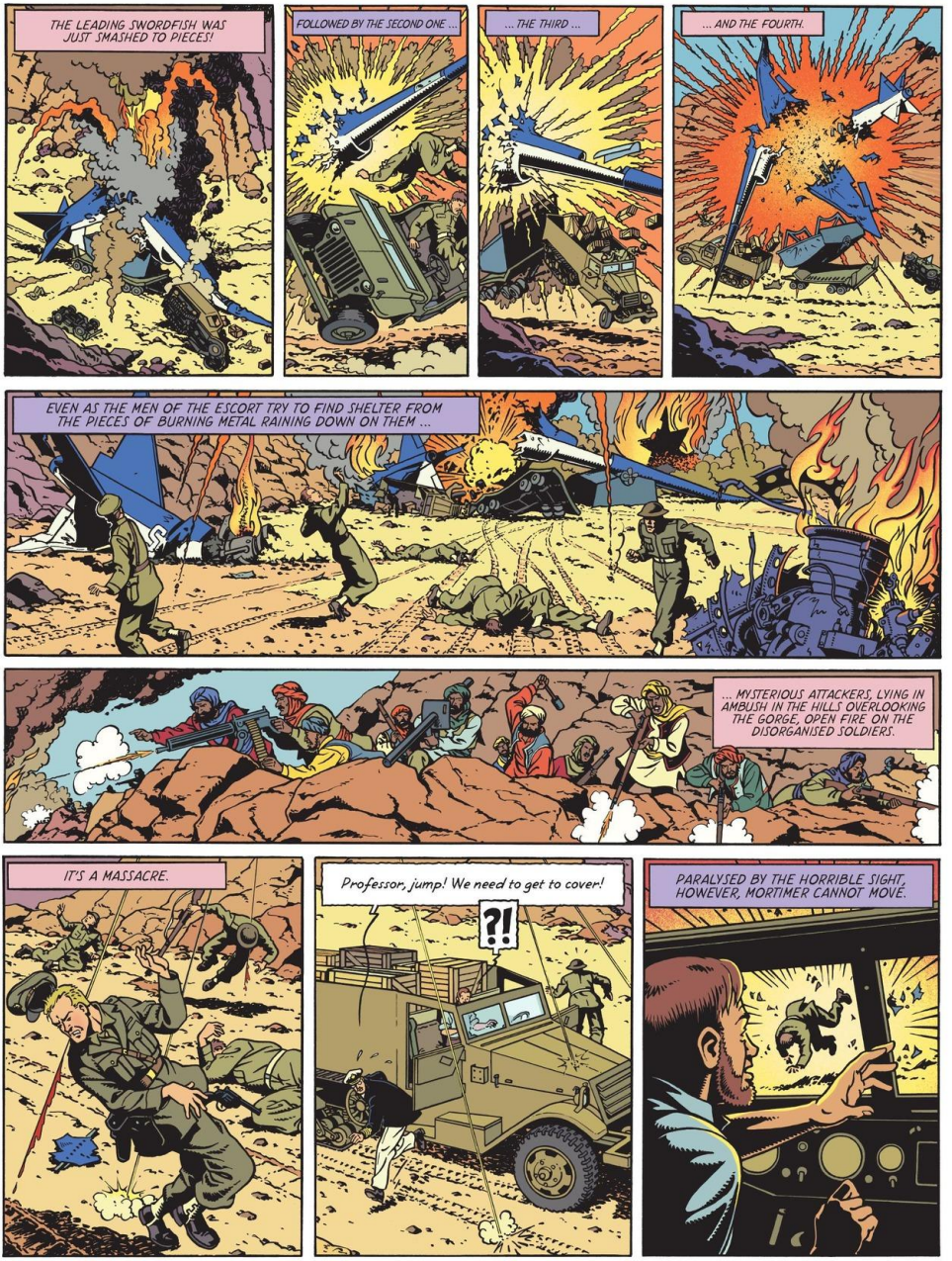

All right? Still with me? Let's try to get you out of those ropes now.
Aargg... brfff... brrrfff...
... BUT THE NOOSE IS TOO HIGH AND TOO TIGHT FOR HIM TO UNDO. THE ROPE NEEDS TO BE CUT.
WITH WHAT, THOUGH? HE HAS NO BLADE OF ANY KIND ON HIM, AND THERE IS NO SIGN OF A SHARP EDGE ANYWHERE IN THIS GLOOMY, EMPTY, WINDOWLESS ROOM.
THE CAPTAIN BEGINS BY UNTYING THE BONDS AROUND THE BOY'S WRISTS ...
STRUCK WITH INSPIRATION, HE PULLS HIS FAKE GLASSES OUT OF HIS POCKET, SMASHES THEM, AND PICKS UP HALF A LENS ...
CRACK
... WHICH HE THEN HANDS TO LIAM, DESPITE THE LATTER'S STILL PANICKED EXPRESSION.
Here, take this.
What ... What am I supposed to do with that?
What you must. The stool is too small for both of us to fit on it. You have to cut the rope yourself. With this. It's all I have.
HAVING UNDERSTOOD, LEGS SHAKING, THE YOUNG IRISHMAN BEGINS TO SAW THROUGH THE THICK ROPE WITH THE PATHETIC TOOL ...
... WHILE BLAKE TIES THE END OF THE THINNER ROPE – THE ONE USED TO TIE LIAM'S HANDS – TO THE HANDLE OF THE DOOR THAT CONSTITUTES THEIR ONLY WAY OUT.
AFTER 15 LONG MINUTES OF EFFORT, YOUNG LIAM, FREE AT LAST, JUMPS DOWN FROM HIS STOOL ...
... AND RUSHES TOWARDS THE STILL CLOSED DOOR, BUT BLAKE ROUGHLY HOLDS HIM BACK.
No! It would be too easy.
What?! Why?
The stool. Milligan left it knowing very well I'd use it. You're going to climb on my shoulders and untie the rope from its hook.


Milligan was a tad too insistent about the fact that this door isn't locked... Face the back wall, kneel down, and put your arms over your head.
AND, JUST AS HE EXPECTED, A POWERFUL EXPLOSION BLOWS THE DOOR TO SMITHEREENS ...
... AND SHOWERS THE TWO KNEELING MEN WITH BITS OF RUBBLE AND PLASTER DUST.
GETTING BACK TO HIS FEET FIRST, LIAM DASHES THROUGH THE GAPING HOLE LEFT BY THE BLAST ...
... AND FREEZES ON THE THRESHOLD, REFUSING TO BELIEVE HIS EYES, WHICH ARE REDDENED BY THE DUST AND TEARS.
PART OF THE ROOF HAS COLLAPSED OVER THE BODY OF THE UNFORTUNATE RILEY, LEFT THERE BY THE IRA MEN.
Da!Da!... Daddy!...
Liam, stop. There's nothing you can do. I'll call the police. They'll take care of him.
Leave me alone, you bastard! You're the reason he's dead! This is your fault!


A gas bottle exploded. I'll go and call emergency services.
THEN, WITH HIS SHOULDERS HUNCHED AND A HEAVY HEART, BLAKE SIMPLY WALKS AWAY, UNIMPEDED ...
... NOT NOTICING THE WAITRESS, WHO, HIDDEN IN A DARK CORNER, DIDN'T MISS A THING.
TWO HOURS LATER, IN THE SMALL, UNMARKED INTELLIGENCE SERVICE PLANE TAKING HIM BACK TO LONDON, THE CAPTAIN STILL CAN'T FIND THE SLEEP HE SO DESPERATELY NEEDS.
HE KNOWS THAT THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE WILL DO RIGHT BY RILEY'S WIDOW AND PAY HER A PENSION, BUT NO AMOUNT OF MONEY CAN REPLACE A LOST HUSBAND AND FATHER. LOST BECAUSE OF THE MAN WHO HIRED HIM, AS POOR LIAM HAD SHOUTED. BLASTED JOB.
... BUCKINGHAM! BLAKE REMEMBERS THAT, DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE IRA, WITH SUPPORT FROM THE NAZIS, HAD ATTEMPTED TO BLOW UP THE ROYAL FAMILY'S PALACE TWICE. COULD THEY POSSIBLY ...?
BUT, LET US LEAVE OUR FRIEND BLAKE TO HIS QUESTIONS AND RETURN TO PROFESSOR MORTIMER, WHO, 3,000 MILES TO THE EAST, IS GREETED BY AN AMAZING SIGHT.
?!

Remarkable, isn't it? Rafts on wheels. Our engineers came up with the idea.
It will take us two hours to reach a flat shore, then another two hours at sea for the rafts to get to the carrier HMS King George waiting for us in the Strait of Hormuz.
Why not simply have them travel underwater, like during the war?
Because their pilots were demobilised after the war ended, but mostly because there are far too many of the naval mines left that were laid by the Imperials. As for flying them out, assuming we had recalled the surviving pilots, well, the Swordfishes have a limited range, and they would have had to refuel in Malta, which the whole world would see.
SX 5
While here, at least, you have nothing of the sort to fear.
Who knows? Any goatherd around here could well be a Russian, American, or French agent ... I'll feel a lot better once this lot is aboard the King George.
But here comes Engineer Hudson now. Is everything ready, Hudson?
Down to the last fuse, Major.
I'm sure you recognised Engineer Hudson, Professor. He's the man who blew up Scafell after you rather hurriedly left the base in the Golden Rocket. He volunteered for a repeat performance here.
What can I say? I do love a good fireworks display! Nice to see you again, Professor.
And you, Hudson. Good luck.
There goes a man who's not afraid of anything ... I'll ride at the end of the convoy with you in order to give him the signal once we're far enough. And, to continue with this streak of nostalgia, we'll be towing your own Swordfish, the SX2.

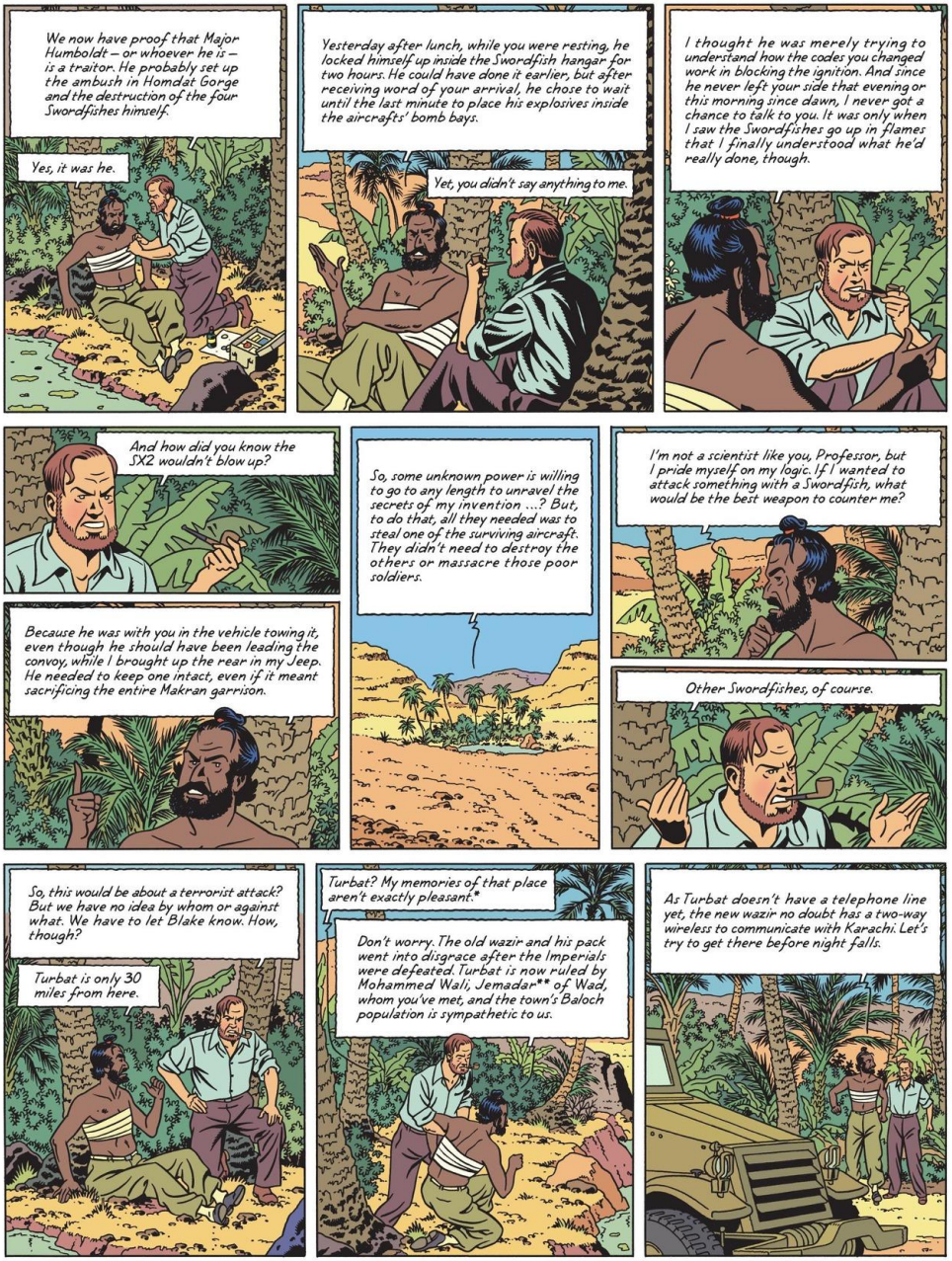

AN HOUR LATER, THE LONG FILE OF VEHICLES ENTERS HOMDAT GORGE.
Hello, Hudson? You have a green light.
THE NEXT INSTANT, A SERIES OF COLOSSAL UNDERGROUND EXPLOSIONS PIERCES THE DESERT'S SILENCE, SHATTERING THE STONE FORTRESS OF THE MAKRAN CLIFFS.
A chapter of history closes, Professor.
A pity my friend Blake couldn't see it with us.
Well, at least I didn't come all the way here for n—
BUT ANOTHER EXPLOSION, AHEAD ON THE ROAD THIS TIME, CUTS OFF MORTIMER ...
BRROOM


THE LEADING SWORDFISH WAS JUST SMASHED TO PIECES!
FOLLOWED BY THE SECOND ONE ...
... THE THIRD ...
... AND THE FOURTH.
EVEN AS THE MEN OF THE ESCORT TRY TO FIND SHELTER FROM THE PIECES OF BURNING METAL RAINING DOWN ON THEM ...
... MYSTERIOUS ATTACKERS, LYING IN AMBUSH IN THE HILLS OVERLOOKING THE GORGE, OPEN FIRE ON THE DISORGANISED SOLDIERS.
IT'S A MASSACRE.
Professor, jump! We need to get to cover!
?!
PARALYSED BY THE HORRIBLE SIGHT, HOWEVER, MORTIMER CANNOT MOVE.

Come on, Professor! Hurry!
No! Stay!
But, the Swordfish ...
This one won't blow up. Hang on tight!
Nasir?!
Sergeant Nasir! Stop! That's an order!
What are you doing?!
Turn around. You'll understand.
BANG
?
He ... He just shot our driver?!?
Just as he will probably finish off any injured survivors once our ambushers cease fire ... before coming after us.
Who are those attackers? Arabs?
They're Bezendjas. A tribe of brigands from Pakistani Balochistan who sell themselves out to anyone, for any sort of job. Including, right now, capturing us.

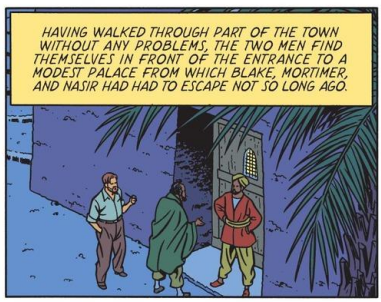
We're going too slowly. Take the wheel! I'm going to try and uncouple that oversized trailer.
What? ... And leave them the Swordfish?!
Would you rather they forced us to take it wherever they want it – along with you as a bonus? Put your foot down, Professor!
AND, WITHOUT GIVING MORTIMER A CHANCE TO ARGUE, NASIR LABORIOUSLY MAKES HIS WAY TO THE REAR OF THE HALF-TRACK.
DESPITE THE BOUNCING OF THE VEHICLE OVER THE ROUGH ROAD, HE ENDEAVOURS TO RELEASE THE HEAVY TRAILER.
SEEING THIS, THE PURSUERS OPEN FIRE ...
BANG
BANG
... BUT AT FULL GALLOP, THEIR MARKSMANSHIP IS FAR FROM PERFECT.
CLUTCHING THE WHEEL, PEDAL TO THE METAL, FILLED WITH DREAD AT THE DANGERS THREATENING NASIR, MORTIMER HUNCHES FORWARD AS HE HEARS THE SHOTS.
AT LAST, WITH ONE FINAL TWIST OF HIS IMPROVISED TOOL ...
CLACK !
... NASIR SUCCEEDS IN OPENING THE PINTLE HOOK, UNCOUPLING THE ENORMOUS TRAILER.
FREED FROM IT'S HEAVY BURDEN, THE HALF-TRACK LURCHES FORWARD, THROWING THE DARING SERGEANT OFF BALANCE. NASIR FALLS ...
!

... BUT WITH A STUPENDOUS REFLEX, HE MANAGES TO GRAB ONTO THE HALF-TRACK'S HOOK.
AS MORTIMER, UNAWARE OF THE DRAMATIC EVENTS TAKING PLACE BEHIND HIM, BARRELS DOWN THE ROCKY DESERT TRAIL ...
... NASIR, HAVING BEEN DRAGGED ALONG SEVERAL DOZEN YARDS OF THE ROUGH GROUND, AT LAST HAULS HIMSELF BACK ONTO THE HALF-TRACK ...
... WHILE THEIR PURSUERS HAVE STOPPED AROUND THE ABANDONED SWORDFISH.
My goodness! Nasir!!
No time for ... heh ... bellyaching, Professor. There's a small oasis 15 miles north-west of here. We can stop there for a while.
JUST UNDER AN HOUR LATER, IN THE DUBIOUS SHADE OF SCRAWNY PALM TREES, MORTIMER CAN FINALLY BANDAGE THE WOUNDS OF HIS COMPANION IN MISERY WITH THE HALF-TRACK'S FIRST AID KIT.
I do have a few questions for you, though.
I expect you do ... Ow! That stings!

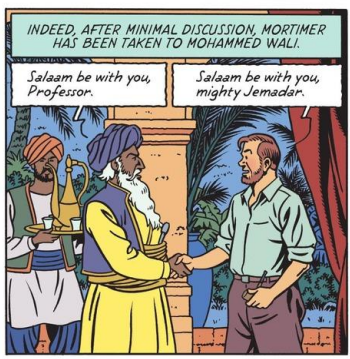


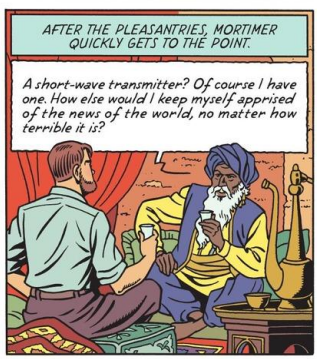
*SEE THE SECRET OF THE SWORDFISH.
**A MILITARY COMMANDER IN THE SERVICE OF A LAND-OWNING ARISTOCRAT

Phew! We're here, and just in time. Our tank is nearly empty.
Better leave the half-track here. We'll be attracting enough attention as it is.

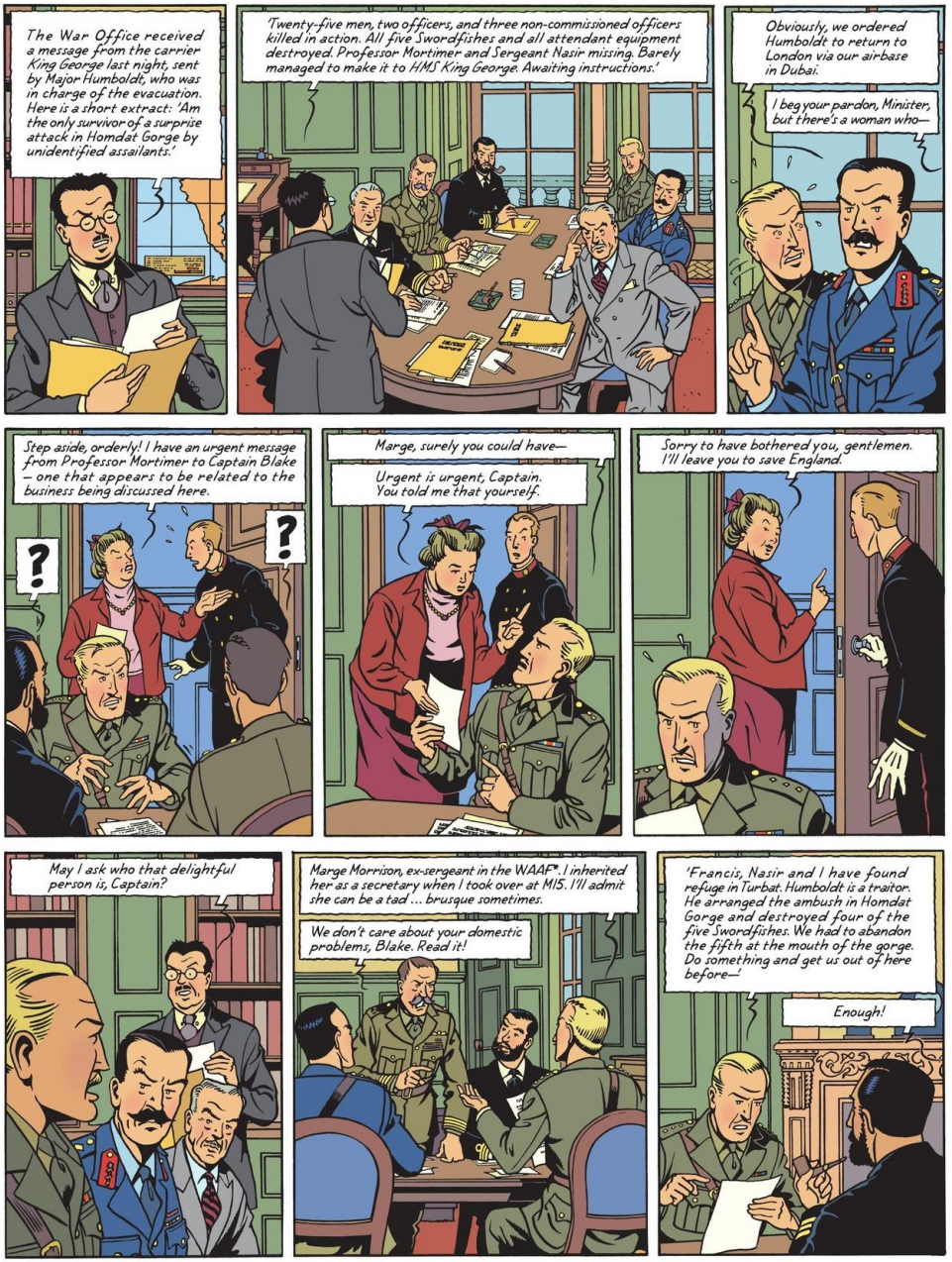

HAVING WALKED THROUGH PART OF THE TOWN WITHOUT ANY PROBLEMS, THE TWO MEN FIND THEMSELVES IN FRONT OF THE ENTRANCE TO A MODEST PALACE FROM WHICH BLAKE, MORTIMER, AND NASIR HAD HAD TO ESCAPE NOT SO LONG AGO.

Go in alone. The new wazir will certainly remember you and meet with you. I'll join you as soon as I acquire more appropriate clothing.


INDEED, AFTER MINIMAL DISCUSSION, MORTIMER HAS BEEN TAKEN TO MOHAMMED WALI.
Salaam be with you, Professor.
Salaam be with you, mighty Jemadar.

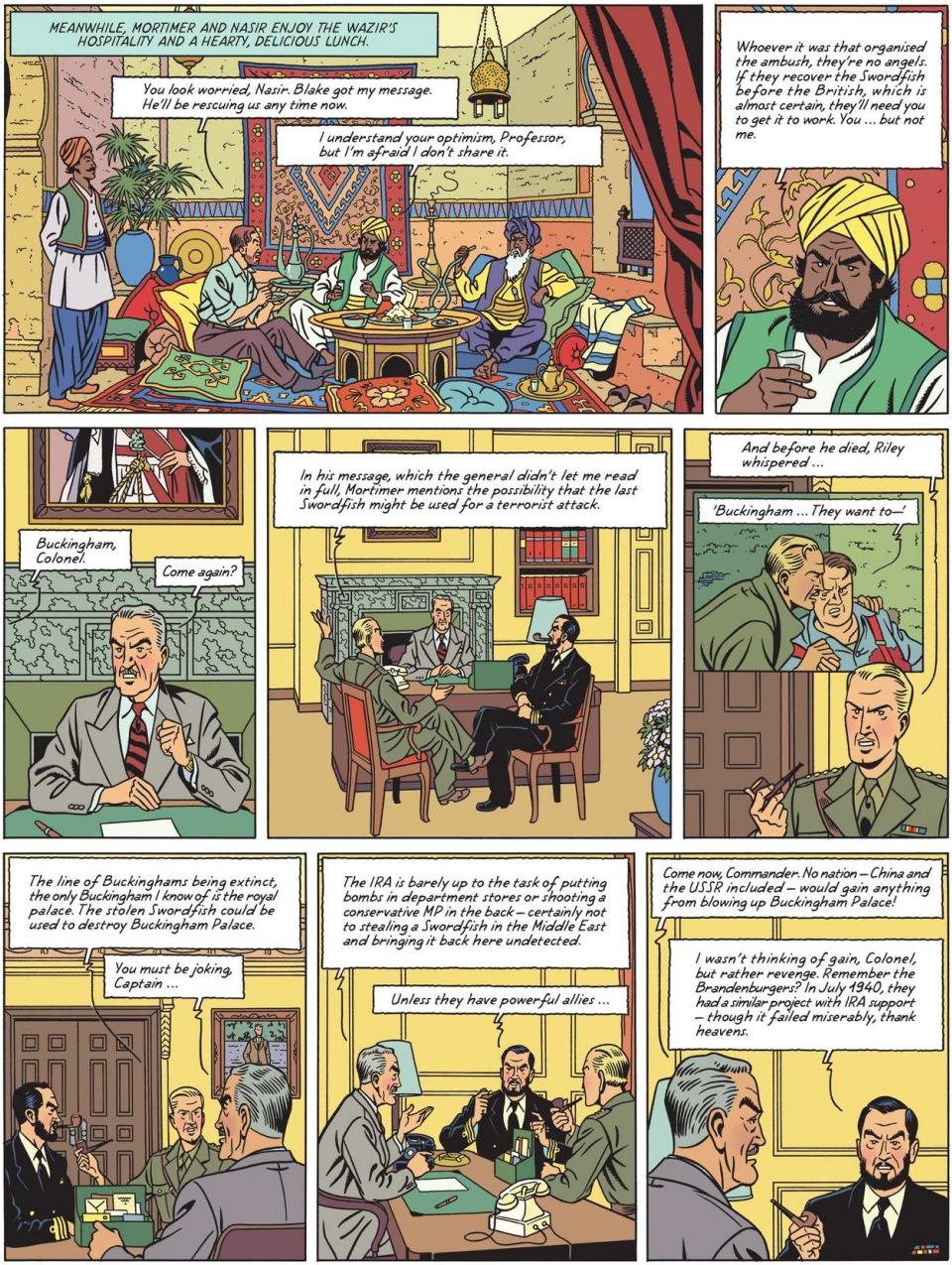

AFTER THE PLEASANTRIES, MORTIMER QUICKLY GETS TO THE POINT.
A short-wave transmitter? Of course I have one. How else would I keep myself apprised of the news of the world, no matter how terrible it is?

THE NEXT MORNING, AN EMERGENCY MEETING IS TAKING PLACE AT THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE IN LONDON.
Gentlemen, the evacuation of our Makran base has turned into a disaster.

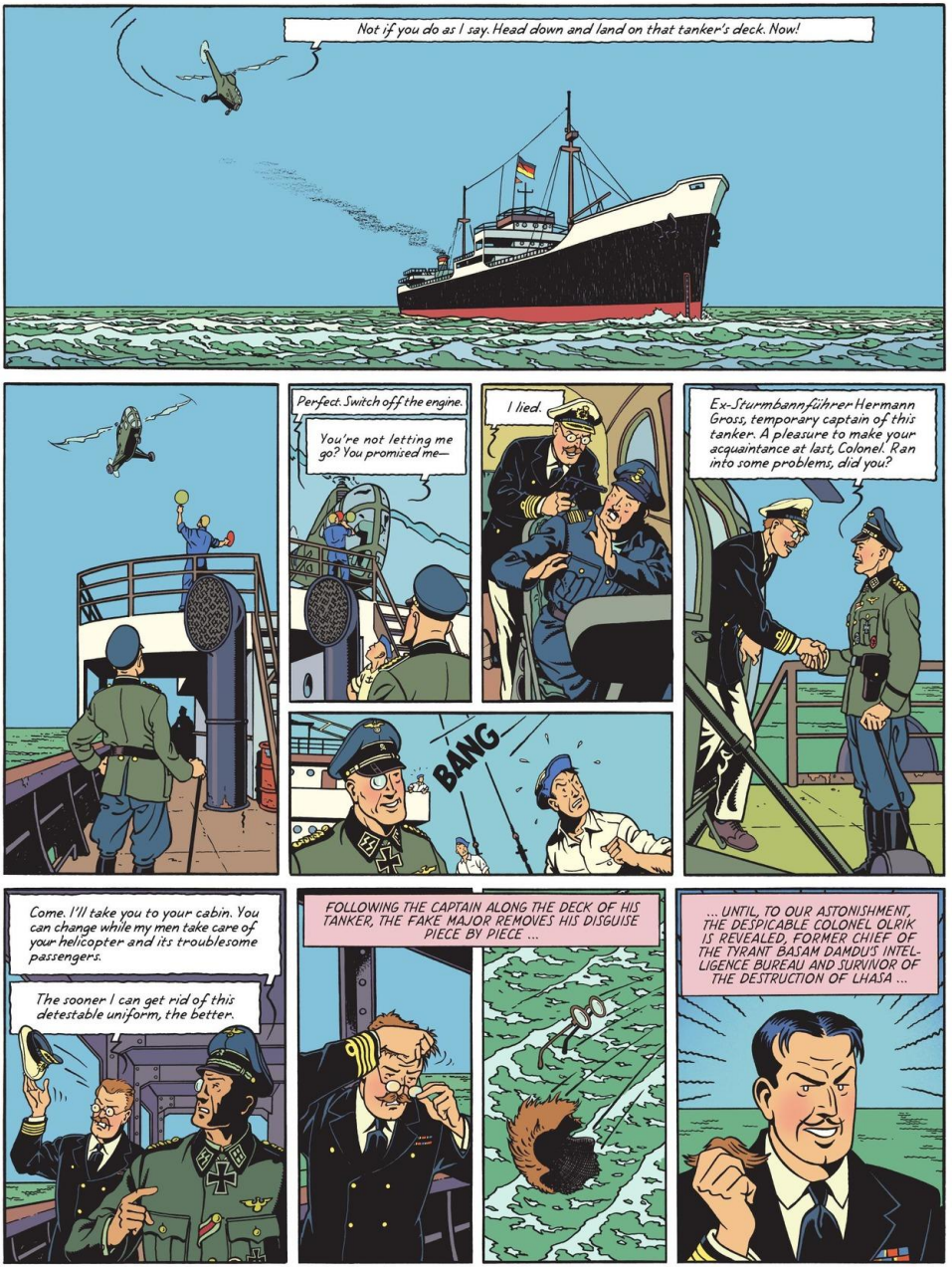


*WOMEN'S AUXILIARY AIR FORCE

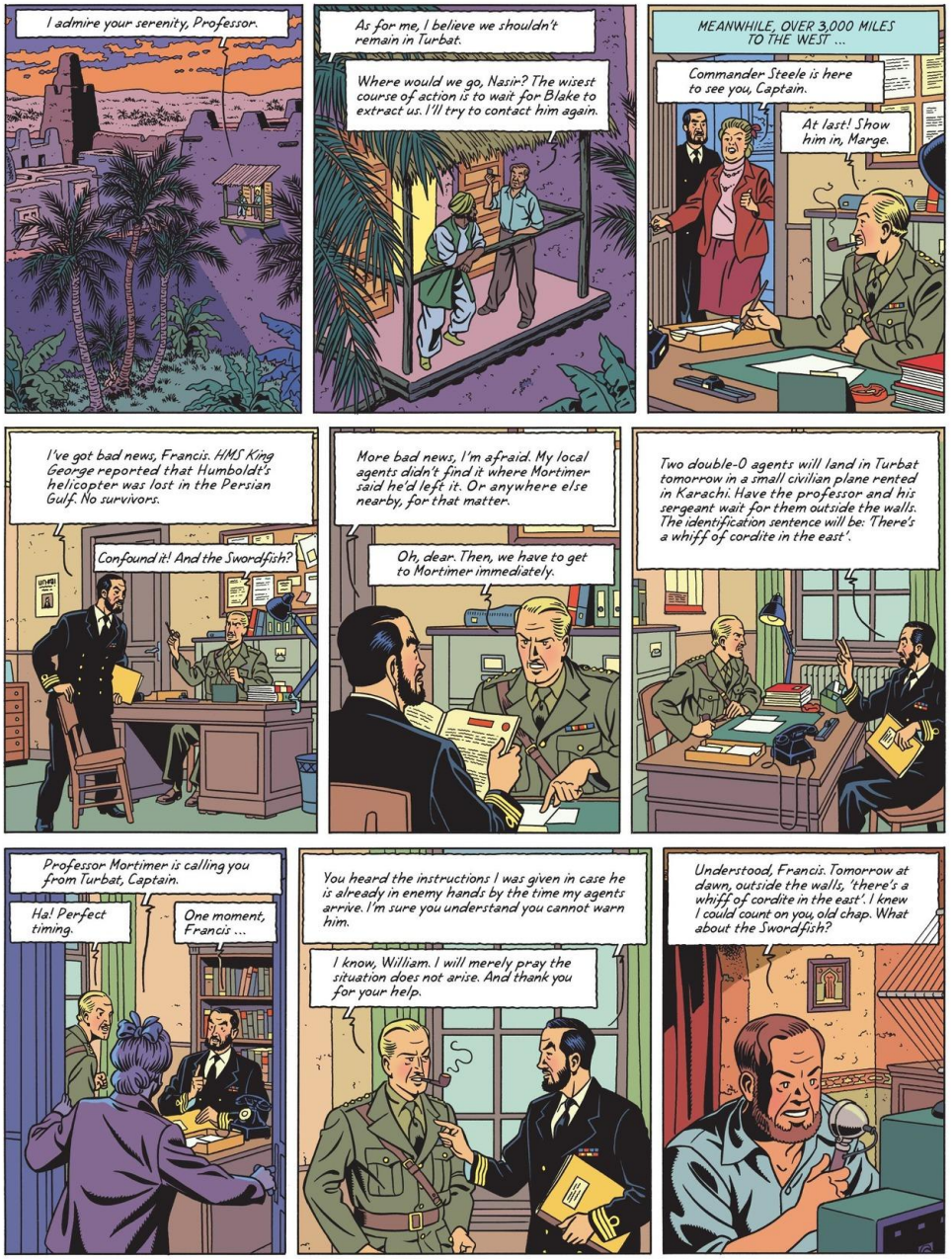
Has your friend Mortimer joined the brotherhood of mad scientists? I've known Rupert Humboldt for 25 years, and his service record is spotless.
A foreign agent could have eliminated him and taken his place.
Then, why don't we ask Admiral Essex here to order the captain of the King George to rip off his fake moustache?
This is hardly the time for jokes, gentlemen. Admiral, have the captain of the King George place this Humboldt under close escort for his transfer to Dubai and subsequent flight to London.
What about the fifth Swordfish, which Professor Mortimer claims is still at large?
We have no choice. It must be destroyed before it falls into enemy hands. Unfortunately, the airspace of brand-new Pakistan is closed to our RAF.
And my friend Mortimer?
Same answer. No more British soldiers on Pakistani soil.
In that case, Captain, the answer to your last question appears to rest with the 'special operations' department of your colleague Commander Steele's MI6. A department I have, of course, never heard of. Gentlemen, this meeting is over. I must be in the House of Lords in fifteen minutes.
Will you agree to help, William?
Of course. Anyway, the minister ordered me to – without actually giving me any such orders.
Our common boss Colonel Cartwright is expecting us in an hour at Intelligence Service Headquarters in Scotland Yard. That gives us enough time to discuss your problem over a cup of coffee. How about it, Francis?
That sounds good, William.
SECRET
AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME, FOLLOWING THE NEW ORDERS FROM LONDON, A ROYAL NAVY HELICOPTER TAKES OFF FROM HMS KING GEORGE WITH MAJOR HUMBOLDT AND HIS ESCORT.


MEANWHILE, MORTIMER AND NASIR ENJOY THE WAZIR'S HOSPITALITY AND A HEARTY, DELICIOUS LUNCH.
You look worried, Nasir. Blake got my message. He'll be rescuing us any time now.
I understand your optimism, Professor, but I'm afraid I don't share it.
Whoever it was that organised the ambush, they're no angels. If they recover the Swordfish before the British, which is almost certain, they'll need you to get it to work. You ... but not me.
Buckingham, Colonel.
Come again?
In his message, which the general didn't let me read in full, Mortimer mentions the possibility that the last Swordfish might be used for a terrorist attack.
And before he died, Riley whispered ...
'Buckingham ... They want to—'
The line of Buckinghams being extinct, the only Buckingham I know of is the royal palace. The stolen Swordfish could be used to destroy Buckingham Palace.
You must be joking, Captain ...
The IRA is barely up to the task of putting bombs in department stores or shooting a conservative MP in the back – certainly not to stealing a Swordfish in the Middle East and bringing it back here undetected.
Unless they have powerful allies ...
Come now, Commander. No nation – China and the USSR included – would gain anything from blowing up Buckingham Palace!
I wasn't thinking of gain, Colonel, but rather revenge. Remember the Brandenburgers? In July 1940, they had a similar project with IRA support – though it failed miserably, thank heavens.

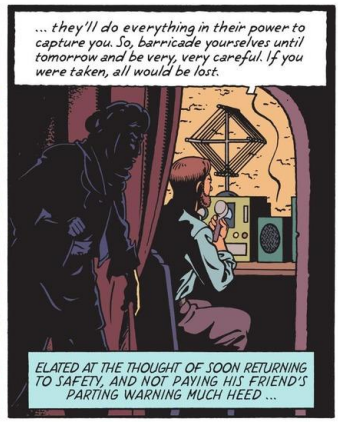
I remain dubious, but fine. If the last Swordfish is destroyed, the whole question becomes moot. And since the Army is no longer authorised to operate in Pakistan, it will be up to you, Commander Steele.
What if our men fail? Our foes have a considerable lead on us.
In that case, it will become imperative that Professor Mortimer does not fall into their clutches, since he is the only man who can get that machine of death started.
What?!?
You mean you would have our own men shoot him?!
Obviously, I'd much rather Steele's commando brought your friend back safe and sound, Captain. But if that proves impossible, national interest must come before any other consideration. You're dismissed, gentlemen.
May I ask to what do I owe the honour of your escort, gentlemen, and why my service weapon was taken from me?
We don't know, Major. All we know is that we're to go with you all the way to London. Captain's orders.
Well, at least I'll have company, then. Oh, that looks like an oil tanker ...
... but I can't quite make out its ensign.
Black, red, and yellow ... that's a German ship.
Excellent ...
... then this is my stop.
BANG
I won't be needing the company.
BANG
Are ... Are you going to kill me, too?


Not if you do as I say. Head down and land on that tanker's deck. Now!
Perfect. Switch off the engine.
You're not letting me go? You promised me—
I lied.
Ex-Sturmbannführer Hermann Gross, temporary captain of this tanker. A pleasure to make your acquaintance at last, Colonel. Ran into some problems, did you?
BANG
Come. I'll take you to your cabin. You can change while my men take care of your helicopter and its troublesome passengers.
The sooner I can get rid of this detestable uniform, the better.
FOLLOWING THE CAPTAIN ALONG THE DECK OF HIS TANKER, THE FAKE MAJOR REMOVES HIS DISGUISE PIECE BY PIECE ...
... UNTIL, TO OUR ASTONISHMENT, THE DESPICABLE COLONEL OLRIK IS REVEALED, FORMER CHIEF OF THE TYRANT BASAM DAMDU'S INTELLIGENCE BUREAU AND SURVIVOR OF THE DESTRUCTION OF LHASA ...

WHILE THE FAKE MAJOR'S UNFORTUNATE VICTIMS ARE CARELESSLY OFFERED TO THE SHARKS OF THE PERSIAN GULF ...
... AND THE HELICOPTER IS HASTILY REPAINTED TO HIDE ITS ROYAL NAVY LIVERY ...
... OLRIK AND THE FORMER STURMBANNFUHRER HAVE COMFORTABLY ENSCONCED THEMSELVES IN THE OFFICER'S MESS.
Nothing like a glass of schnapps to settle your nerves. Prosit, Colonel!
Cheers, Captain.
While you were changing clothes, I messaged the relevant authorities and declared that I saw a Royal Navy helicopter explode in flight and crash into the sea. No survivors, of course.
I also informed my friend in Ireland, Otto von Rausch, of the partial success of your mission.
Yes, I know. That blasted Mortimer and his Indian lackey managed to escape with the last of the Swordfishes. But they can't have gone far.
The Swordfish isn't a problem. My men and the Bezendjas are towing it to a small cove nearby as we speak. There, we can load it into our specially outfitted hold away from prying eyes. Without Mortimer, though, that aircraft won't be of any use to us.
Cigar?
Thank you.
Let me be clear, my dear colonel. Beyond your well-established reputation, we hired you for your knowledge of the terrain and your acquaintance with those Bezendjas brigands through their band leader, your old spy Razul. Contact him. I'm sure he'll know where Mortimer is hiding.
I am placing the helicopter, a pilot, and two of my men at your disposal. If Mortimer isn't aboard my ship in eighteen hours, we'll consider your mission a failure – with the consequences you can imagine.
Good luck, Colonel!


I admire your serenity, Professor.
As for me, I believe we shouldn't remain in Turbat.
Where would we go, Nasir? The wisest course of action is to wait for Blake to extract us. I'll try to contact him again.
MEANWHILE, OVER 3,000 MILES TO THE WEST ...
Commander Steele is here to see you, Captain.
At last! Show him in, Marge.
I've got bad news, Francis. HMS King George reported that Humboldt's helicopter was lost in the Persian Gulf. No survivors.
Confound it! And the Swordfish?
More bad news, I'm afraid. My local agents didn't find it where Mortimer said he'd left it. Or anywhere else nearby, for that matter.
Oh, dear. Then, we have to get to Mortimer immediately.
Two double-0 agents will land in Turbat tomorrow in a small civilian plane rented in Karachi. Have the professor and his sergeant wait for them outside the walls. The identification sentence will be: 'There's a whiff of cordite in the east'.
Professor Mortimer is calling you from Turbat, Captain.
Ha! Perfect timing.
One moment, Francis ...
You heard the instructions I was given in case he is already in enemy hands by the time my agents arrive. I'm sure you understand you cannot warn him.
I know, William. I will merely pray the situation does not arise. And thank you for your help.
Understood, Francis. Tomorrow at dawn, outside the walls, 'there's a whiff of cordite in the east'. I knew I could count on you, old chap. What about the Swordfish?

Nowhere to be found. Which means our opponents managed to secure it – devil knows how.
Heh. Without me, they can't use it.
That's just it, Philip ...


... they'll do everything in their power to capture you. So, barricade yourselves until tomorrow and be very, very careful. If you were taken, all would be lost.
ELATED AT THE THOUGHT OF SOON RETURNING TO SAFETY, AND NOT PAYING HIS FRIEND'S PARTING WARNING MUCH HEED ...

... MORTIMER HASN'T NOTICED THAT HIS CONVERSATION WITH BLAKE HAS BEEN OVERHEARD BY AN INDIVIDUAL WHOSE SILHOUETTE IS FAMILIAR TO US.

MEANWHILE, HAVING DONE A SPOT OF SHOPPING, NASIR HURRIES THROUGH THE STREETS OF THE SMALL TOWN ...

... HIS EYES CONSTANTLY SEARCHING FOR POTENTIAL SPIES ...

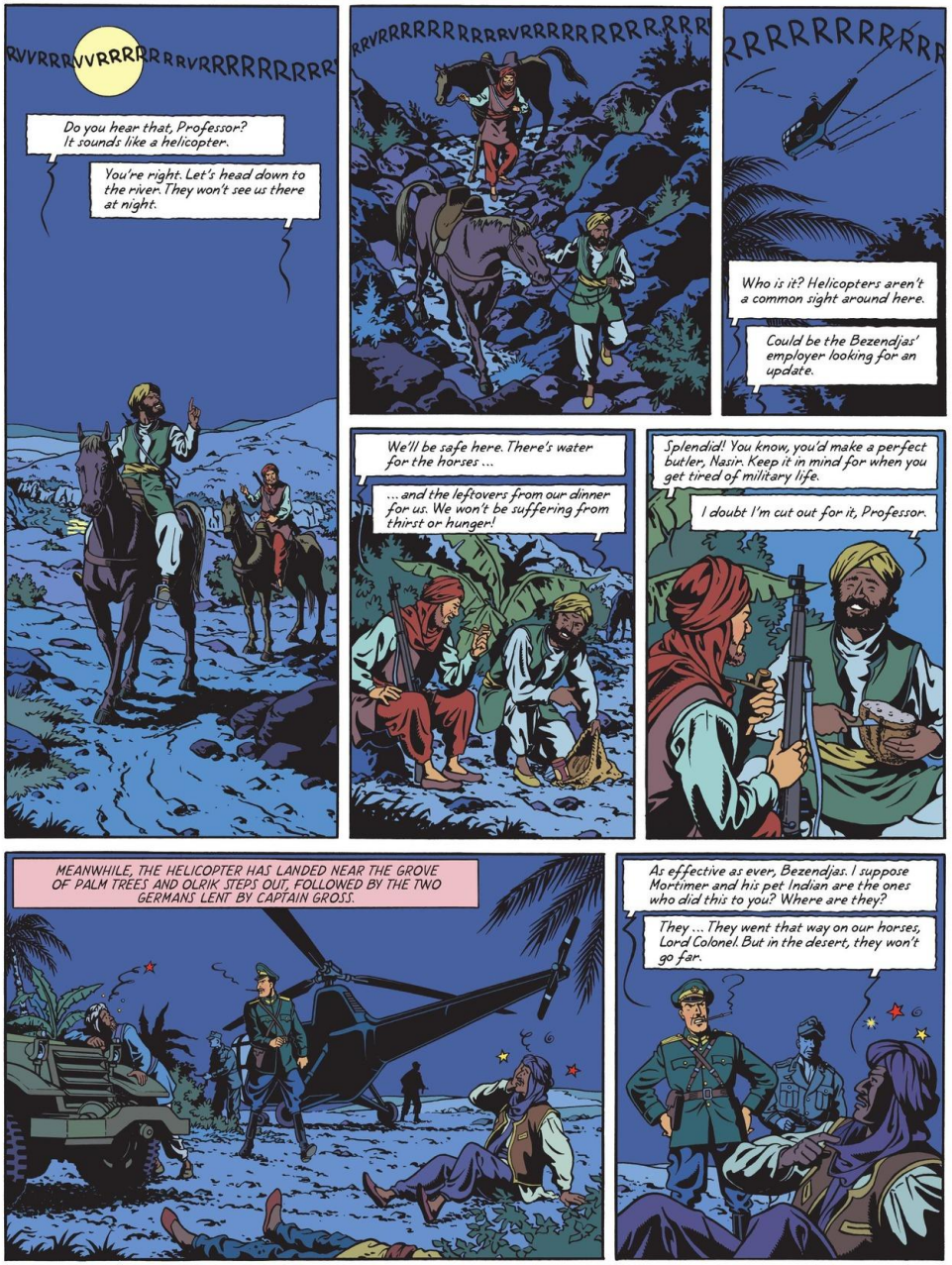
... UNTIL, RELIEVED, HE REACHES THE WAZIR'S PALACE.

BUT, JUST AS HE IS ABOUT TO WALK IN, HE IS SUDDENLY KNOCKED OVER BY THE EAVESDROPPER WHO DASHES OUT THE DOOR AND DOWN THE STREET ...

By the Prophet's Beard! The Bezendjas!

The Bezendjas?! Here?!
He came running out of the palace. He most likely heard your conversation with the captain ... and the convoy was attacked by Bezendjas ...
They certainly didn't do it for themselves. And those bandits are quite capable of laying siege to the palace in order to deliver us to whoever is paying them.
You had it right from the start, Nasir. We must leave Turbat right away.
Not in these clothes, Professor. I bought you some that will attract a little less attention.
As long as there's a pocket for my pipe and tobacco pouch ...
MORTIMER HAVING CHANGED, THE TWO MEN DISCREETLY LEAVE THE PALACE THROUGH THE GARDENS.
EXITING THE TOWN GATE ...
... THEY HEAD FOR THE GROVE OF PALM TREES WHERE THEY HAD LEFT THEIR HALF-TRACK.
Where do you hope to go, Professor? The tank is nearly empty.
Even getting a few miles out of here will help. Tomorrow at dawn, we'll watch for our rescuers' plane in order to meet them where they land, and then we can just hop in and leave.
GNN
GNN GNN
GNN
Will you start already, you useless piece of rubbish?
GNN
GNN
GNN
I doubt it.
?
You won't be going anywhere without the ignition leads. Get out!

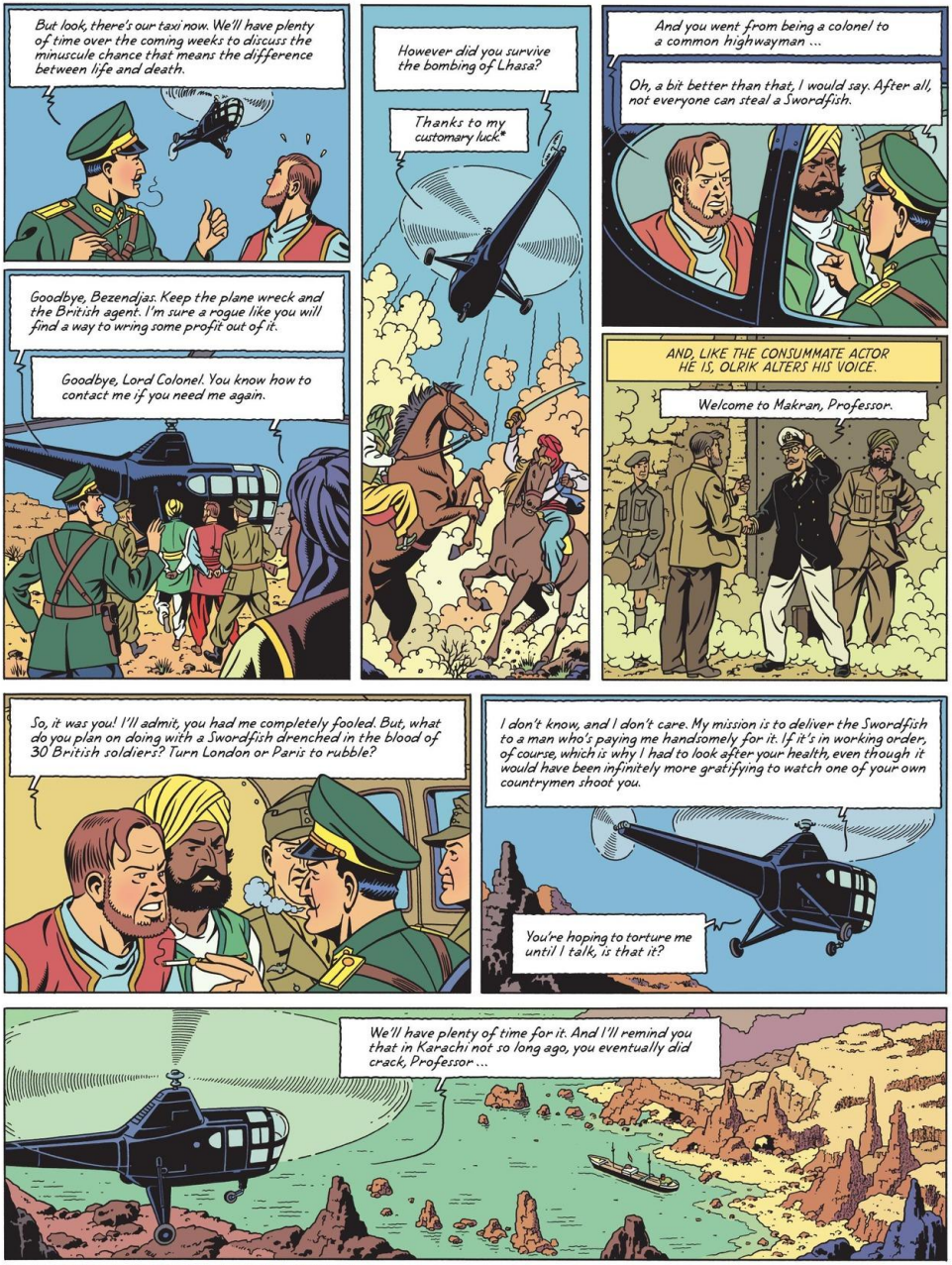
STRETCHING OVER HIS SEAT, MORTIMER DISARMS RAZUL WITH A MASTERFUL KICK, JUST AS NASIR PREPARES TO LEAP ...
... UPON ONE OF THE HORSEMEN, ROUGHLY UNSEATING HIM.
BANG
THE SECOND HORSEMAN POINTS HIS RIFLE AT MORTIMER, WHO IS GOING FOR THE BEZENDJAS' SUB-MACHINE GUN ...
... BUT NASIR SWIFTLY THROWS HIS DEADLY KNIFE ...
... HITTING THE MAN IN THE THROAT.
Argh!
I'd love to know whom you work for, Bezendjas, but unfortunately, I don't have time to question you.


RVVRRRVVRRRRRRVRRRRRRRRR
Do you hear that, Professor? It sounds like a helicopter.
You're right. Let's head down to the river. They won't see us there at night.
RRVRRRRRRRRRVRRRRRRRRRRR
RRRRRRRRRR
Who is it? Helicopters aren't a common sight around here.
Could be the Bezendjas' employer looking for an update.
We'll be safe here. There's water for the horses ...
... and the leftovers from our dinner for us. We won't be suffering from thirst or hunger!
Splendid! You know, you'd make a perfect butler, Nasir. Keep it in mind for when you get tired of military life.
I doubt I'm cut out for it, Professor.
MEANWHILE, THE HELICOPTER HAS LANDED NEAR THE GROVE OF PALM TREES AND OLRIK STEPS OUT, FOLLOWED BY THE TWO GERMANS LENT BY CAPTAIN GROSS.
As effective as ever, Bezendjas. I suppose Mortimer and his pet Indian are the ones who did this to you? Where are they?
They ... They went that way on our horses, Lord Colonel. But in the desert, they won't go far.

You'll catch them soon enough with your helicopter.
In the dark of night, you fool?! You're right about one thing, though. They won't have gone far, since they'll be waiting for the rescue they were promised... according to your own report of the conversation between Mortimer and that blasted Blake.
Get rid of your useless friend's body and gather ten more armed riders to spend the rest of the night here with us. Bring me one of your rocket-propelled grenades, too.
Yes, Lord Colonel.
And find an open-top staff car for me and my men. And something to eat and drink. Well, get to it, Bezendjas! I pay you enough for that.
As you command, Lord Colonel.
AND, WHILE OLRIK AND HIS MEN FEAST AROUND A WARM BONFIRE ...
... A FEW MILES FROM THEM, MORTIMER, TAKING HIS TURN ON WATCH, WONDERS LIKE ALL MEN DRAWN INTO A FIGHT THAT ISN'T THEIRS WHETHER HE'LL STILL BE ALIVE THE NEXT DAY.
AFTER A FEW HOURS OF RESTLESS SLEEP, IT FEELS AS THOUGH HE'S BARELY EVEN CLOSED HIS EYES WHEN NASIR ROUGHLY SHAKES HIM AWAKE.
Get up, Professor. The plane's coming.
!?
LIFTING HIS EYES TOWARDS THE SOURCE OF THE ENGINE'S LOW HUM, MORTIMER SOON GLIMPSES A SMALL WESTLAND LYSANDER PREPARING TO LAND NEARBY.
Saddle up! We need to reach it quickly.
ALAS, THE TWO MEN AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WHO HAVE HEARD THE AIRCRAFT ARRIVE ...
Forwards, you ruffians!

A.R.O.M.
Wait, what ...?
Don't shoot! I'm Professor Mortimer. There's a whiff of cordite in the east!
Get in! Hurry! We've got company coming.
PHTUNG
Panzerschreck!

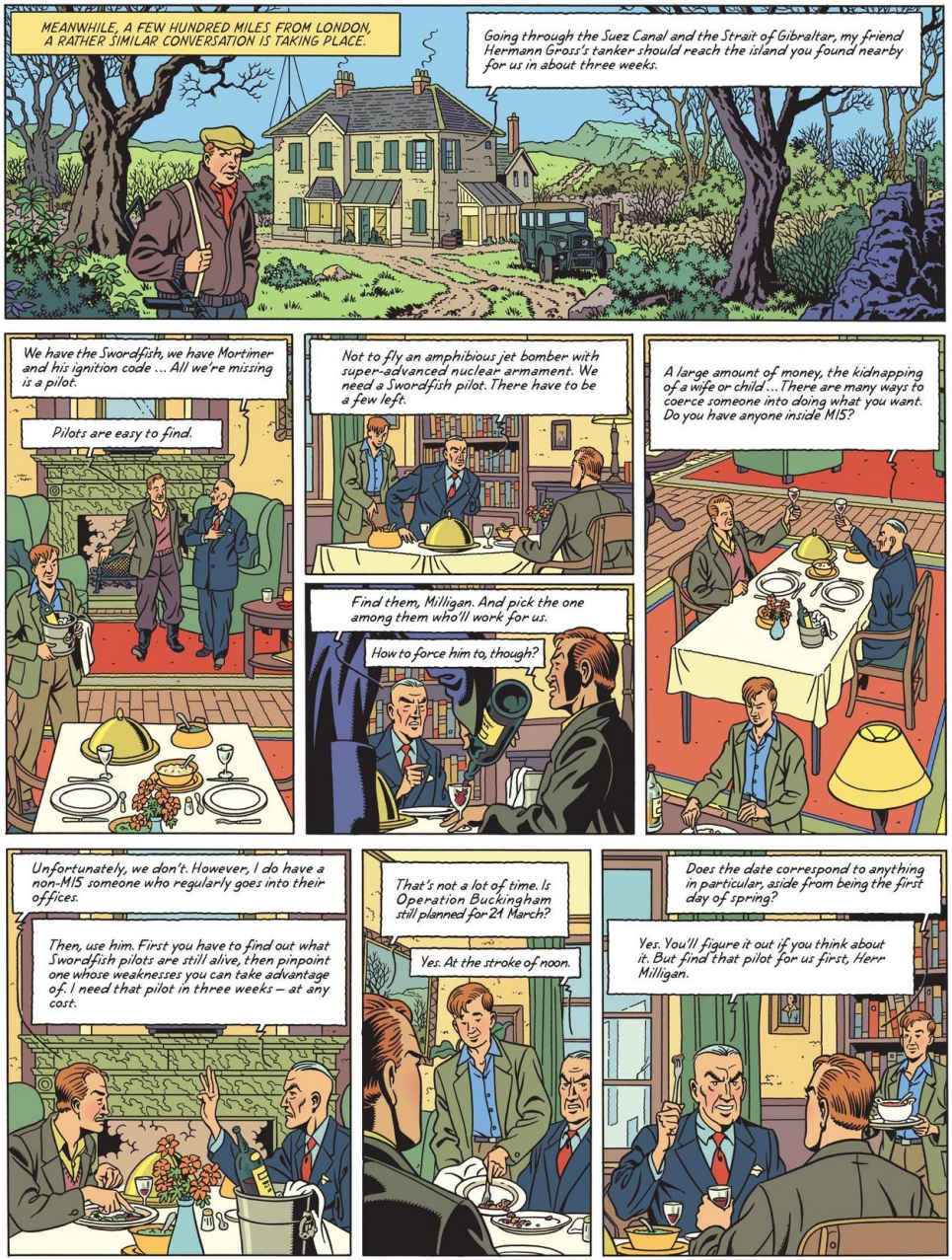
So much for that ... Plan B, then.
Sorry, Professor. I have my orders.
What?!?? ...
BANG
No, it can't be ... This isn't happening ...
And yet it is, Professor. You're not dreaming. I just saved your life.
That agent was evidently ordered by your friend Blake not to let you fall into enemy's hands – which, here, means mine. Goodness, but there's just no trusting anyone any more.

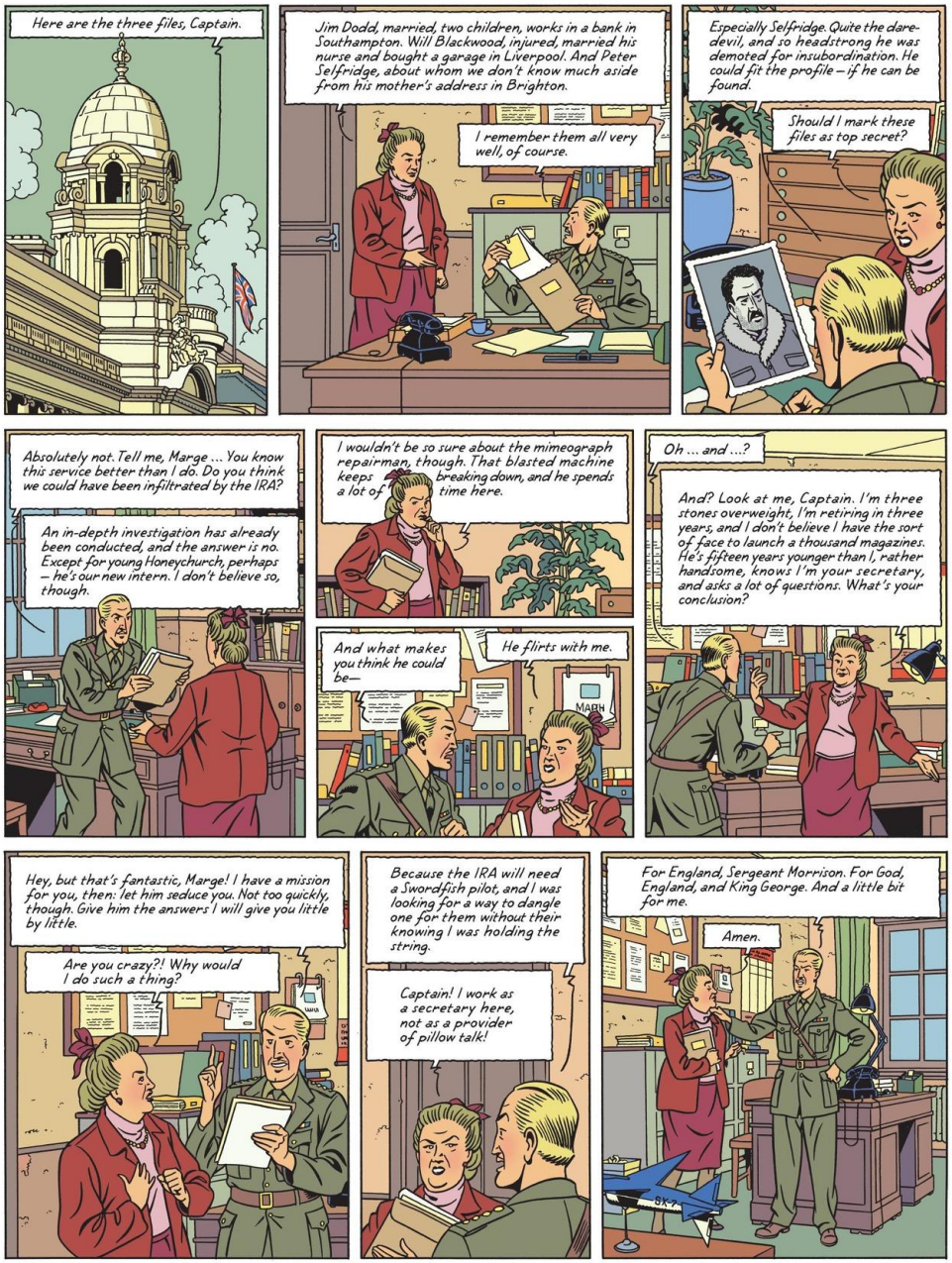


*TO KNOW HOW, READ THE VALLEY OF THE IMMORTALS.

Except that you'll find it more difficult to escape from this windowless cabin, even with three weeks at sea to work with.
But I'm a generous man, so I got you everything to make your stay comfortable: your favourite whisky, plenty of tobacco, and a selection of all the best authors – Shakespeare, Plato, Oscar Wilde ...
On this table are some paper and the gold pen Basam Damdu presented me with when I became head of his Intelligence Bureau.
Where's Nasir?
AT THAT INSTANT, AN AGONISED SCREAM FILLS THE ROOM, COMING FROM NEARBY.
What ... What was that? ...
That?
Why, that was the answer to your question. The good sergeant is in the cabin next door, being repeatedly and pointedly asked a question he doesn't know the answer to ... though you do. Would you like some whisky?
This ... This is despicable. Your methods are vile and cowardly.
Yet extremely effective.
The pen and paper are right here. Obviously, we'll have to wait until we reach our destination before we can check whether the code you're going to give us is correct ... but I'm sure you can imagine what will happen to your Indian friend should you attempt to lie to us.
HIS HEART HEAVY, HANDS SHAKING WITH RAGE, BUT ABOVE ALL DREADING TO HEAR ANOTHER SCREAM, MORTIMER HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO FRANTICALLY WRITE DOWN THE IGNITION CODE FOR THE SX2'S ENGINE.
Perfect.
Kurt, you can go and stop the interrogation. Have the sergeant sent to sickbay.

TWO DAYS LATER, AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE IN LONDON...
I am not impressed, Commander Steele.
One agent killed. The other injured, and now holed up in our consulate in Karachi after the consul had to pay 25,000 Sterling in cash for his freedom. A rental plane to pay off. A missing Swordfish. And, of course, Professor Mortimer kidnapped by an unknown enemy. This is what I call a comprehensive failure. Don't expect a Christmas bonus this year.
I'm sorry, Colonel, but—
Spare me your excuses. For your next supposedly secret missions, I suggest you train some more effective double-0 agents.
At least Philip is alive. To me, this failure comes as a relief. Besides, there's no guarantee he'll give his kidnappers the new code.
Come now, Blake. Your friend isn't trained to resist torture. And, whether the target is Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, or 10 Downing Street, we have a Swordfish with nuclear armament ready to strike at us at any time.
You're forgetting one detail, Colonel ...
Oh? And what is that, Captain?
For the Swordfish to fly, it doesn't just need the ignition code. It needs a pilot, too.
So what? After two world wars in close succession, fighter pilots are ten a penny.
Not qualified to fly a Swordfish. Even an experienced pilot needs six months of intensive training to master the aircraft and its weapons.
They have Mortimer.
A Swordfish's cockpit only seats one. They wouldn't let Mortimer fly off alone ...
SECRET
Besides the professor and myself, there are only three Swordfish pilots left, all demobilised after the end of the war against the Yellow Empire. I have their files in my archives.


MEANWHILE, A FEW HUNDRED MILES FROM LONDON, A RATHER SIMILAR CONVERSATION IS TAKING PLACE.
Going through the Suez Canal and the Strait of Gibraltar, my friend Hermann Gross's tanker should reach the island you found nearby for us in about three weeks.
We have the Swordfish, we have Mortimer and his ignition code ... All we're missing is a pilot.
Pilots are easy to find.
Not to fly an amphibious jet bomber with super-advanced nuclear armament. We need a Swordfish pilot. There have to be a few left.
Find them, Milligan. And pick the one among them who'll work for us.
How to force him to, though?
A large amount of money, the kidnapping of a wife or child... There are many ways to coerce someone into doing what you want. Do you have anyone inside MI5?
Unfortunately, we don't. However, I do have a non-MI5 someone who regularly goes into their offices.
Then, use him. First you have to find out what Swordfish pilots are still alive, then pinpoint one whose weaknesses you can take advantage of. I need that pilot in three weeks – at any cost.
That's not a lot of time. Is Operation Buckingham still planned for 21 March?
Yes. At the stroke of noon.
Does the date correspond to anything in particular, aside from being the first day of spring?
Yes. You'll figure it out if you think about it. But find that pilot for us first, Herr Milligan.


Here are the three files, Captain.
Jim Dodd, married, two children, works in a bank in Southampton. Will Blackwood, injured, married his nurse and bought a garage in Liverpool. And Peter Selfridge, about whom we don't know much aside from his mother's address in Brighton.
I remember them all very well, of course.
Especially Selfridge. Quite the daredevil, and so headstrong he was demoted for insubordination. He could fit the profile – if he can be found.
Should I mark these files as top secret?
Absolutely not. Tell me, Marge ... You know this service better than I do. Do you think we could have been infiltrated by the IRA?
An in-depth investigation has already been conducted, and the answer is no. Except for young Honeychurch, perhaps – he's our new intern. I don't believe so, though.
I wouldn't be so sure about the mimeograph repairman, though. That blasted machine keeps breaking down, and he spends a lot of time here.
And what makes you think he could be—
He flirts with me.
Oh ... and ...?
And? Look at me, Captain. I'm three stones overweight, I'm retiring in three years, and I don't believe I have the sort of face to launch a thousand magazines. He's fifteen years younger than I, rather handsome, knows I'm your secretary, and asks a lot of questions. What's your conclusion?
Hey, but that's fantastic, Marge! I have a mission for you, then: let him seduce you. Not too quickly, though. Give him the answers I will give you little by little.
Are you crazy?! Why would I do such a thing?
Because the IRA will need a Swordfish pilot, and I was looking for a way to dangle one for them without their knowing I was holding the string.
Captain! I work as a secretary here, not as a provider of pillow talk!
For England, Sergeant Morrison. For God, England, and King George. And a little bit for me.
Amen.

THREE WEEKS HAVE GONE BY. THE CODE PROVIDED BY MORTIMER WAS TESTED; THEN THE SX2 WAS LEFT UNDER CLOSE GUARD ON A DESERTED ISLET NEAR THE WESTERN COAST OF IRELAND AND THE TANKER WENT BACK TO ITS HOME PORT, BREMERHAVEN. BLINDFOLDED, THEIR HANDS TIED, NASIR AND THE PROFESSOR WERE TAKEN TO OTTO VON RAUSCH'S VILLA BY HELICOPTER BEFORE BEING IMMEDIATELY LOCKED UP IN A REASONABLY COMFORTABLE CELLAR WITHOUT A WORD BEING SAID TO EITHER OF THEM.

Now that the Swordfish's ignition has been successfully tested, why keep them alive? I'd have been glad to get rid of them for you.

I don't doubt it, Colonel, but I may still need them should some technical problem develop.

Moreover, in eight days, once my plan is a success, our Irish friends will release them and they can confirm it was the IRA, and the IRA alone, who organised the attack we're preparing, thereby lending that secret army genuine weight in their negotiations with the English.

That's true, Colonel. My apologies. Here is the rest of the agreed-upon payment. A bearer cheque, like the previous one, since I do not know where and under what name your bank account is open.

Thank you.

Could you ask the helicopter pilot to drop me off at the nearest airport?

Well, it's your problem, anyway. I have a plane to catch.

Oh, I forgot one small detail ...

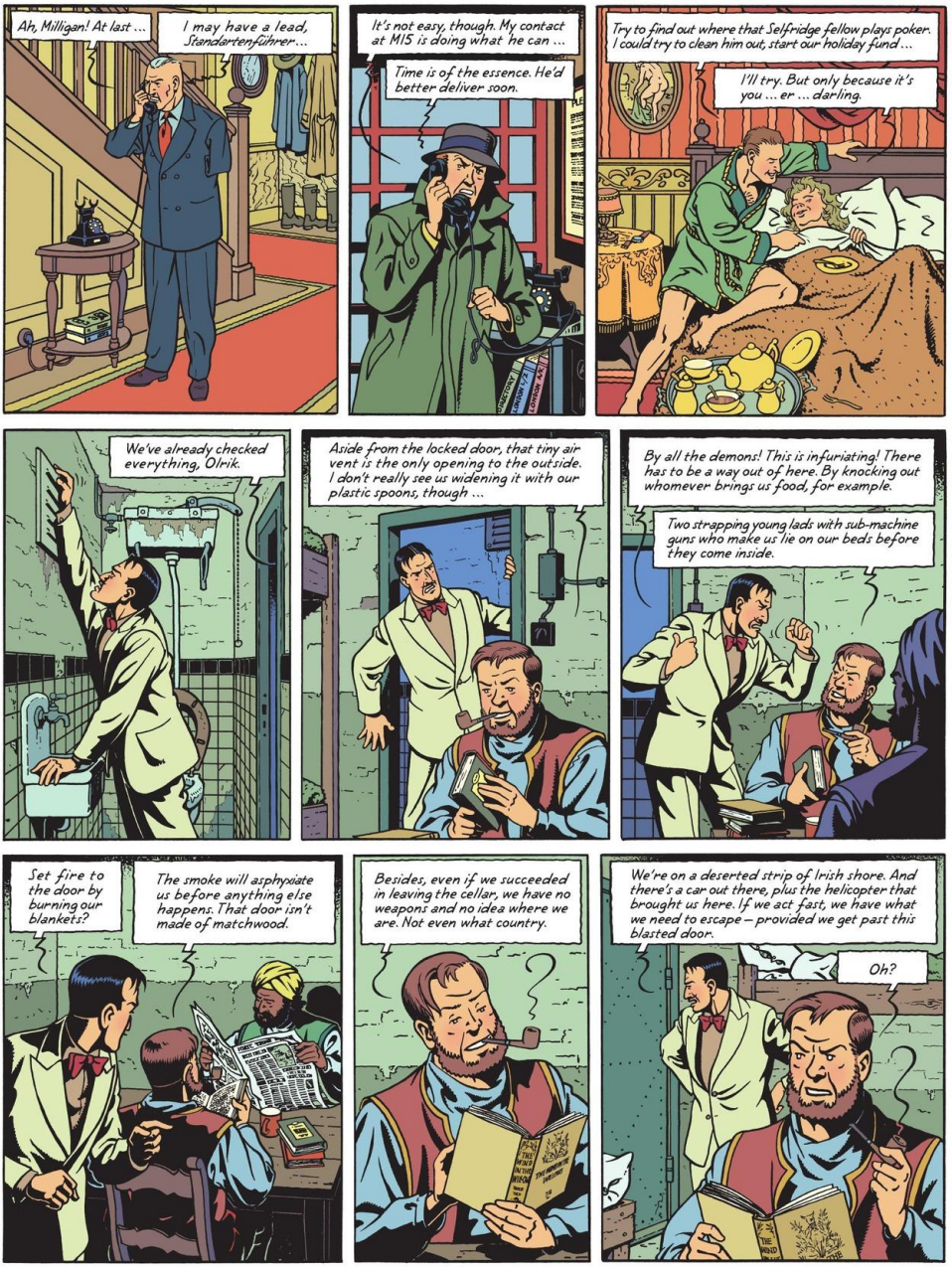
You've certainly lived up to your reputation, Colonel, and you have my thanks. But that reputation also makes it clear that you're willing to sell your services to the highest bidder ...

Meaning ...?

Meaning that we shall be keeping you here until our operation is successful. Just to spare you the temptation of selling my name to some authority or other.

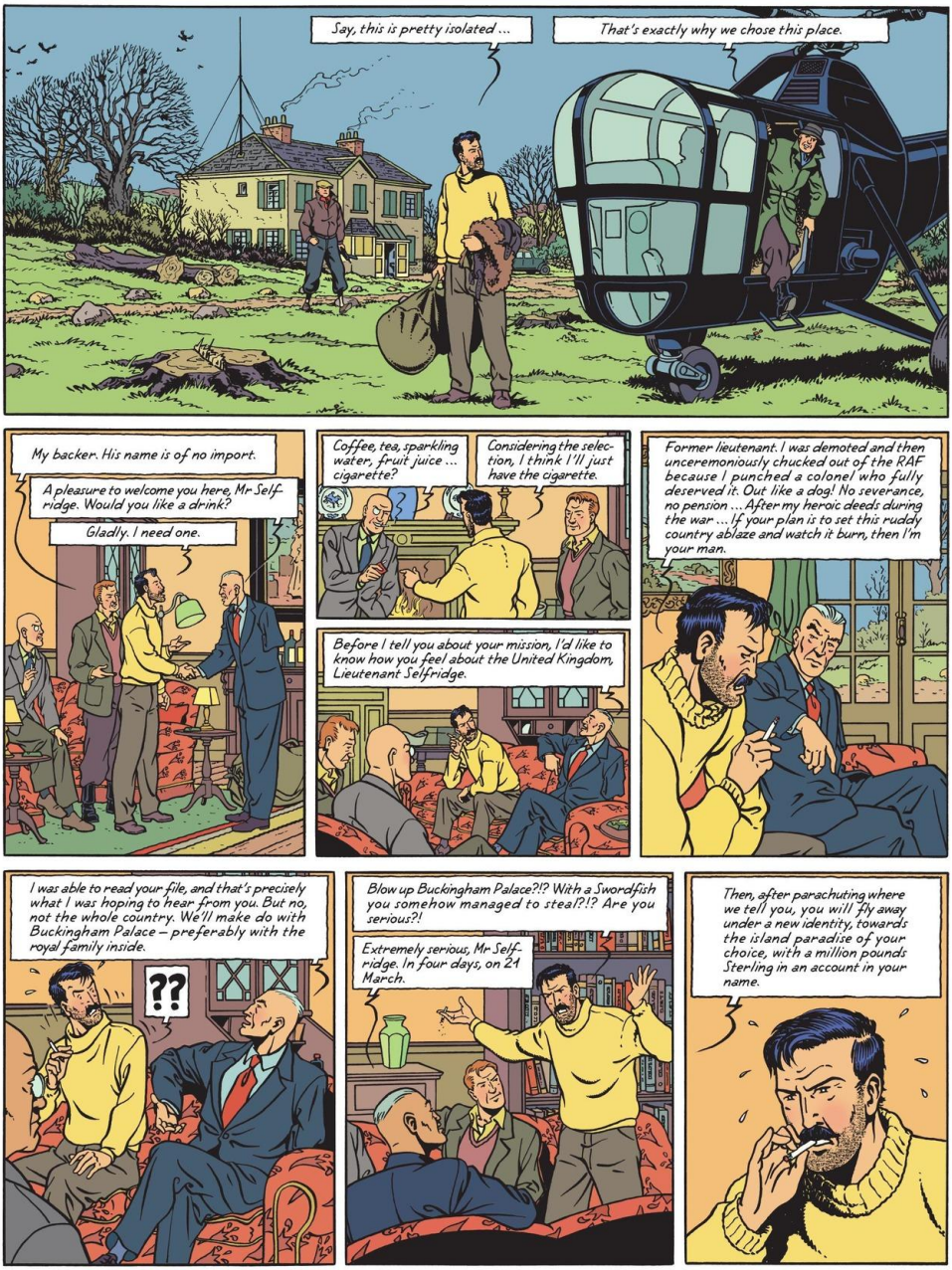
??

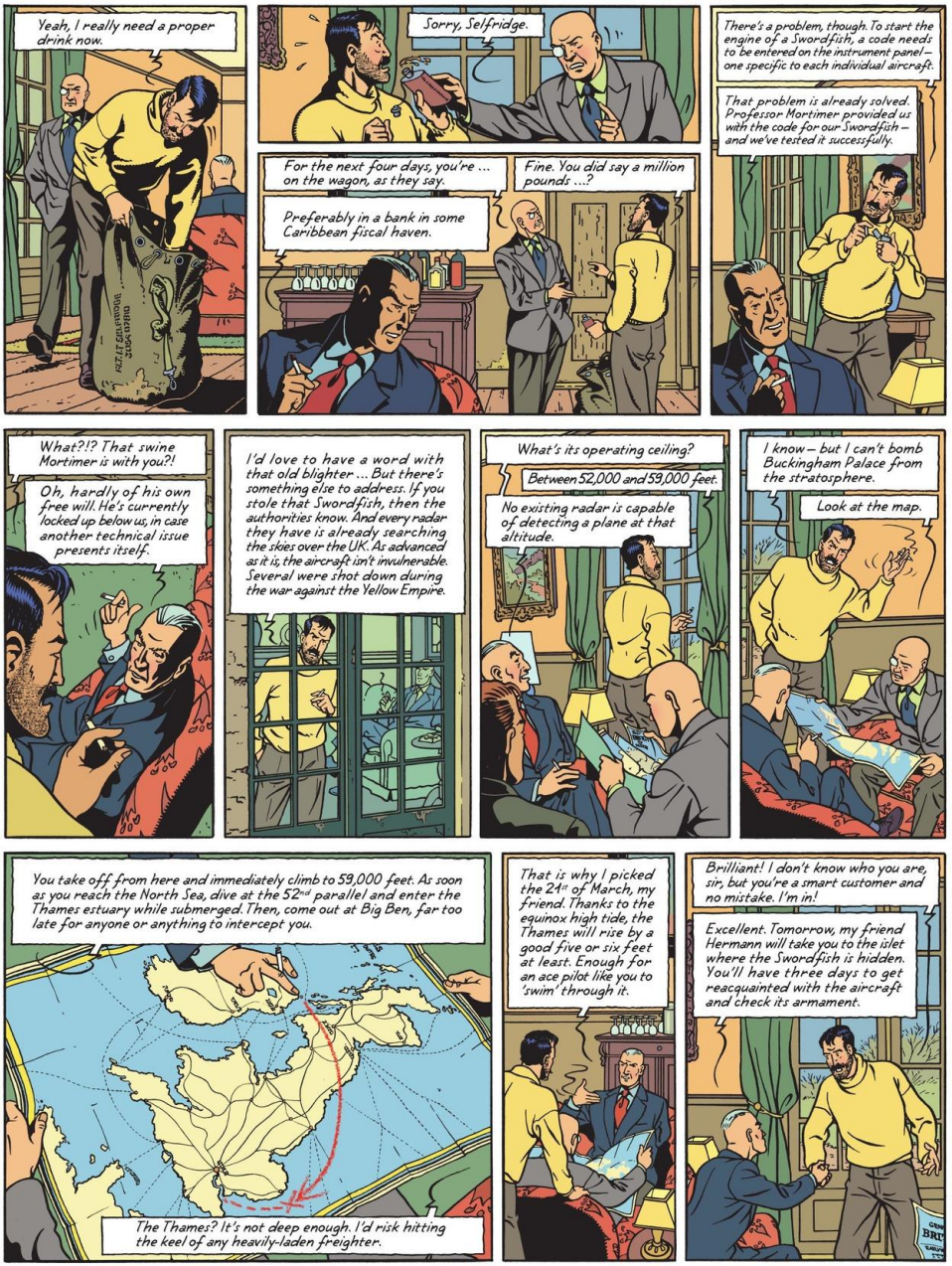
Olrik, what a lovely surprise! ... Nasir and I had been wondering whom the third bunk was for.

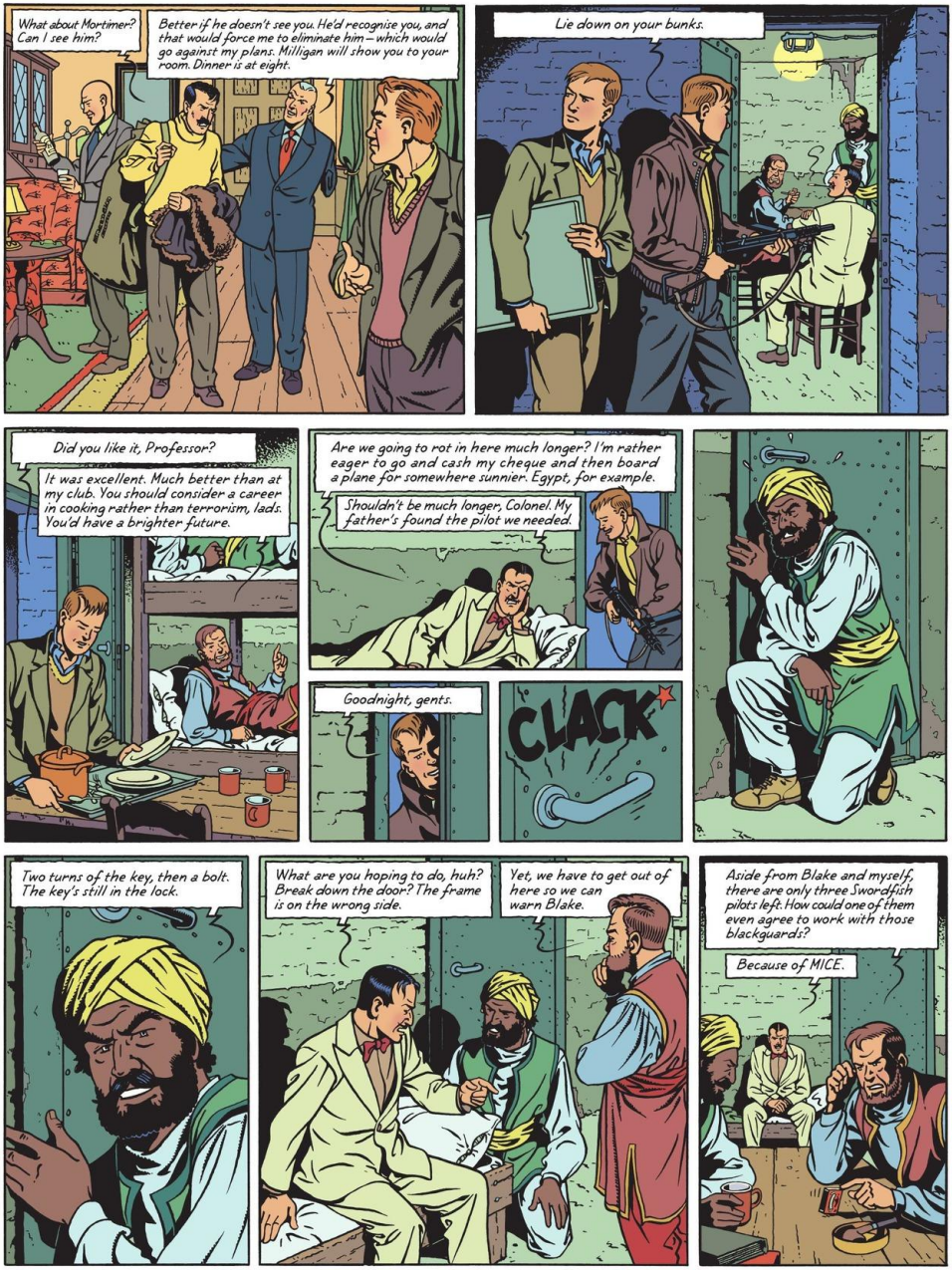

Ah, Milligan! At last ...
I may have a lead, Standartenführer...
It's not easy, though. My contact at MI5 is doing what he can ...
Time is of the essence. He'd better deliver soon.
Try to find out where that Selfridge fellow plays poker. I could try to clean him out, start our holiday fund ...
I'll try. But only because it's you ... er ... darling.
We've already checked everything, Olrik.
Aside from the locked door, that tiny air vent is the only opening to the outside. I don't really see us widening it with our plastic spoons, though ...
By all the demons! This is infuriating! There has to be a way out of here. By knocking out whomever brings us food, for example.
Two strapping young lads with sub-machine guns who make us lie on our beds before they come inside.
Set fire to the door by burning our blankets?
The smoke will asphyxiate us before anything else happens. That door isn't made of matchwood.
Besides, even if we succeeded in leaving the cellar, we have no weapons and no idea where we are. Not even what country.
We're on a deserted strip of Irish shore. And there's a car out there, plus the helicopter that brought us here. If we act fast, we have what we need to escape – provided we get past this blasted door.
Oh?

TWO NIGHTS LATER, IN THE BACK ROOM OF A DODGY BAR IN SOHO ...
Full house, queens over jacks! Pot's mine, boyos!
Well, I'm done for tonight. Goodnight, mates.
Where d'you think you're going, Selfridge?
Bed. Why d'you think I said goodnight, Al?
Why don't you give me the money you owe me first? Don't you think that'd be a good idea?
You know ruddy well I'm broke, Al. Give me time to win some back.
So you've been saying for days, Selfridge ... Dirk, take one of his fingers.
No, don't—
One finger per each day you're late. That's the price. I hope you're not a pianist ...
Beg your pardon, gentlemen ...
Who are you? How did you get in?
I used this universal pass ... Don't worry, though. I'm no copper. How much does this gentleman owe you?
It's 730 pounds. And he's no gentleman.
That's 710, 720 ... and a round 730.
If you're his guardian angel, I suggest you get the bloke looked at. He drinks like a fish, is useless at poker, and doesn't even have a rathole to sleep in.
That was precisely my plan. Come on, Peter. The bar in my hotel is open all night, and I booked a room for you.

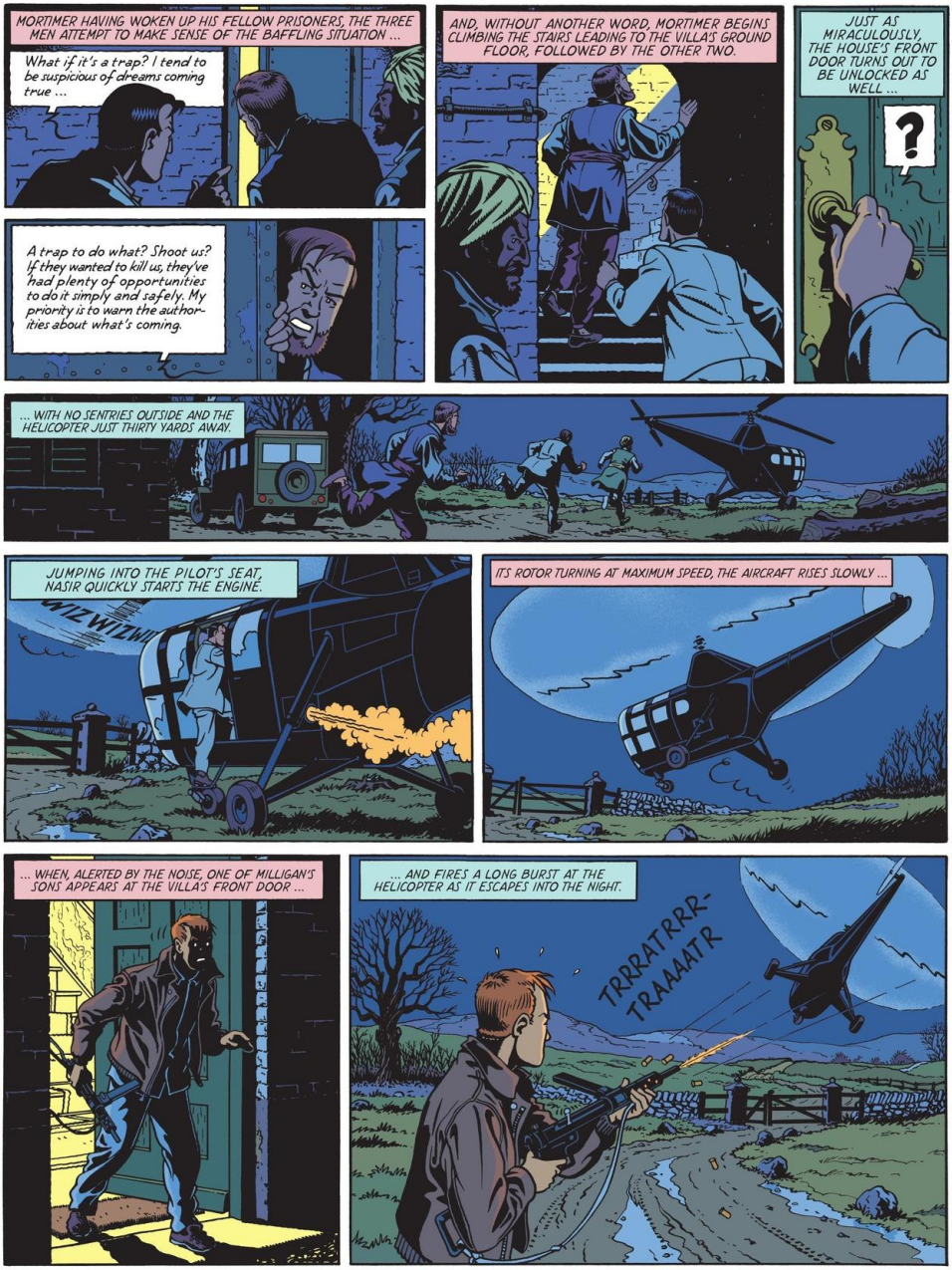
A LITTLE LATER, STILL FLABBERGASTED, SELFRIDGE FINDS HIMSELF SITTING WITH THE STRANGER IN THE BAR OF AN UPSCALE HOTEL IN THE BRITISH CAPITAL.
How did the brilliant Swordfish pilot you were fall so far from grace, Selfridge?
I'll have none of that from you, Mr Guardian Angel! If you forked out £30 quid just so you could lecture me, you can ruddy well go to—
Sit down and open this envelope. There's 1,000 pounds inside.
A thousand pounds for you to have a good night's sleep and then come with me to your dear mother's place in Brighton to pick up a few things, including your flight suit. I know it's there.
Flight suit?! I only have the one from my days flying a Swordfish. D'you have one of those?
Yes. And I'd like you to fly it on a very, very handsomely paid mission.
Really? How much?
Far more than you could imagine. My backer will explain. See you tomorrow, Peter. Sweet dreams ... of wads of cash and warm, sandy beaches.
Good morning, Mrs Morrison. My, but you look in splendid form this morning.
That's Miss Morrison, please, young Honeychurch.
Today, I'd like you to get started on buying us a new mimeograph ...
... but of a different brand than this one, which I'm afraid is now permanently broken.


Say, this is pretty isolated ...
That's exactly why we chose this place.
My backer. His name is of no import.
A pleasure to welcome you here, Mr Self-ridge. Would you like a drink?
Gladly. I need one.
Coffee, tea, sparkling water, fruit juice ... cigarette?
Considering the selection, I think I'll just have the cigarette.
Before I tell you about your mission, I'd like to know how you feel about the United Kingdom, Lieutenant Selfridge.
Former lieutenant. I was demoted and then unceremoniously chucked out of the RAF because I punched a colonel who fully deserved it. Out like a dog! No severance, no pension ... After my heroic deeds during the war ... If your plan is to set this ruddy country ablaze and watch it burn, then I'm your man.
I was able to read your file, and that's precisely what I was hoping to hear from you. But no, not the whole country. We'll make do with Buckingham Palace – preferably with the royal family inside.
??
Blow up Buckingham Palace?!? With a Swordfish you somehow managed to steal?!? Are you serious?!
Extremely serious, Mr Self-ridge. In four days, on 21 March.
Then, after parachuting where we tell you, you will fly away under a new identity, towards the island paradise of your choice, with a million pounds Sterling in an account in your name.

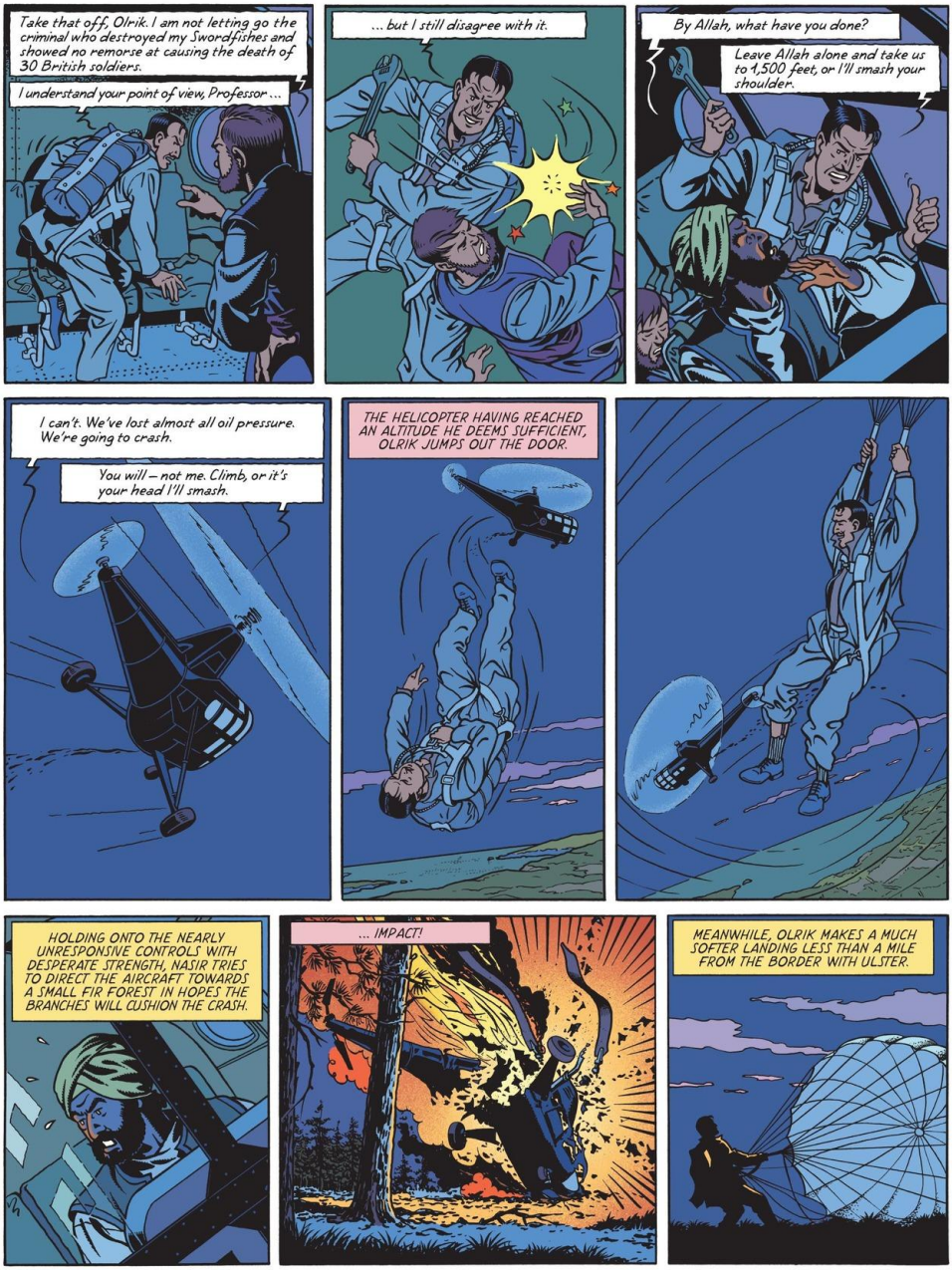

Yeah, I really need a proper drink now.
Sorry, Selfridge.
There's a problem, though. To start the engine of a Swordfish, a code needs to be entered on the instrument panel – one specific to each individual aircraft.
That problem is already solved. Professor Mortimer provided us with the code for our Swordfish – and we've tested it successfully.
For the next four days, you're ... on the wagon, as they say.
Fine. You did say a million pounds ...?
Preferably in a bank in some Caribbean fiscal haven.
What?!? That swine Mortimer is with you?!
Oh, hardly of his own free will. He's currently locked up below us, in case another technical issue presents itself.
I'd love to have a word with that old blighter ... But there's something else to address. If you stole that Swordfish, then the authorities know. And every radar they have is already searching the skies over the UK. As advanced as it is, the aircraft isn't invulnerable. Several were shot down during the war against the Yellow Empire.
What's its operating ceiling?
Between 52,000 and 59,000 feet.
No existing radar is capable of detecting a plane at that altitude.
I know – but I can't bomb Buckingham Palace from the stratosphere.
Look at the map.
You take off from here and immediately climb to 59,000 feet. As soon as you reach the North Sea, dive at the 52nd parallel and enter the Thames estuary while submerged. Then, come out at Big Ben, far too late for anyone or anything to intercept you.
The Thames? It's not deep enough. I'd risk hitting the keel of any heavily-laden freighter.
That is why I picked the 21st of March, my friend. Thanks to the equinox high tide, the Thames will rise by a good five or six feet at least. Enough for an ace pilot like you to 'swim' through it.
Brilliant! I don't know who you are, sir, but you're a smart customer and no mistake. I'm in!
Excellent. Tomorrow, my friend Hermann will take you to the islet where the Swordfish is hidden. You'll have three days to get reacquainted with the aircraft and check its armament.

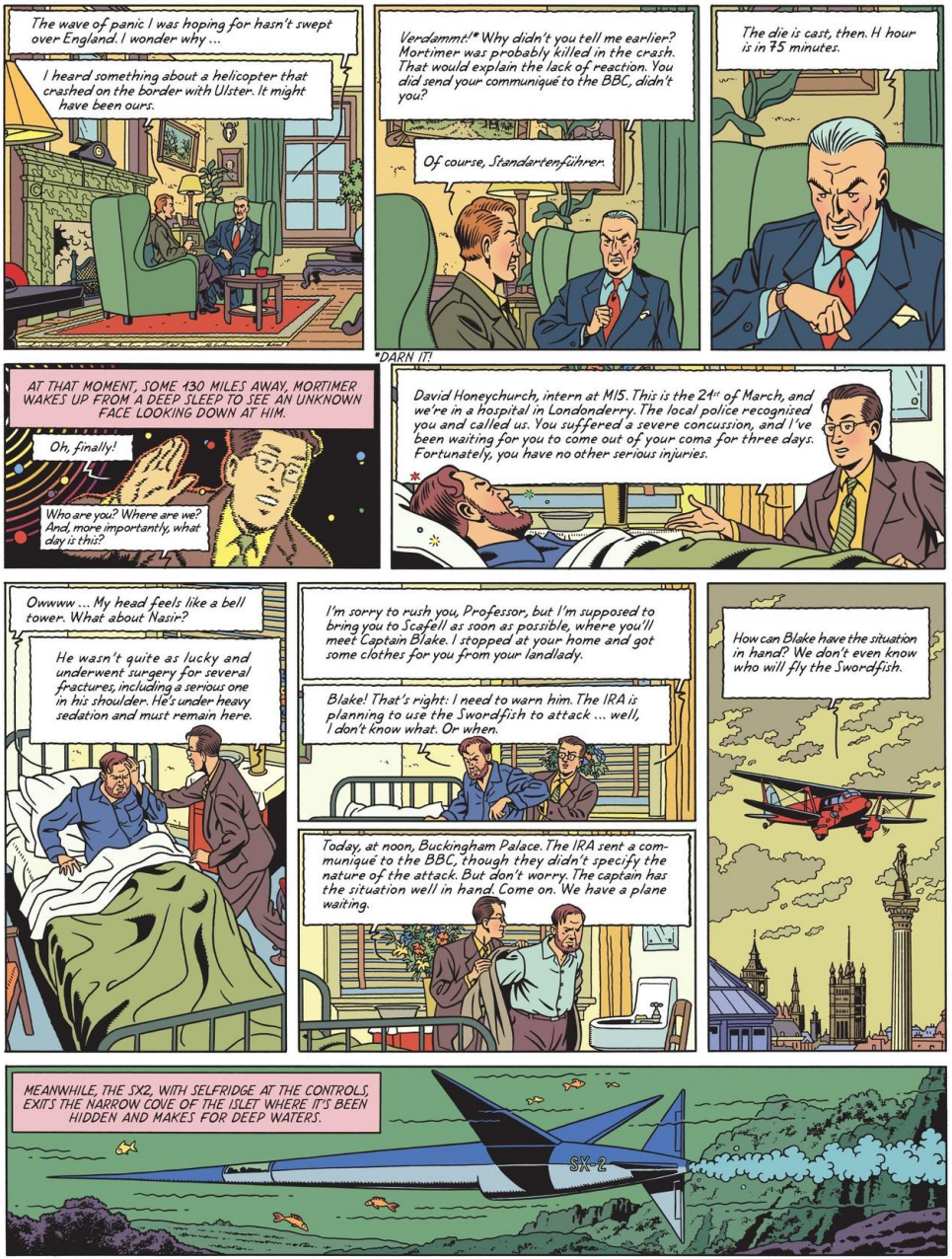

What about Mortimer? Can I see him?
Better if he doesn't see you. He'd recognise you, and that would force me to eliminate him – which would go against my plans. Milligan will show you to your room. Dinner is at eight.
Lie down on your bunks.
Did you like it, Professor?
It was excellent. Much better than at my club. You should consider a career in cooking rather than terrorism, lads. You'd have a brighter future.
Are we going to rot in here much longer? I'm rather eager to go and cash my cheque and then board a plane for somewhere sunnier. Egypt, for example.
Shouldn't be much longer, Colonel. My father's found the pilot we needed.
Goodnight, gents.
CLACK
Two turns of the key, then a bolt. The key's still in the lock.
What are you hoping to do, huh? Break down the door? The frame is on the wrong side.
Yet, we have to get out of here so we can warn Blake.
Aside from Blake and myself, there are only three Swordfish pilots left. How could one of them even agree to work with those blackguards?
Because of MICE.

Come again?
MICE. The four motives that can lead someone to betrayal. Money – usually a lot. Ideology – Marxism, for example. Coercion – kidnapping a loved one, or blackmail over some shameful information. Ego – the feeling of playing an important role.
You're obviously quite familiar with the subject, 'Colonel' ... Though they probably need to add an N for you, as in Nature. Just as with a scorpion, evil and betrayal are part of who you are.
Spare me your two-bit psychology, Professor.
Forget about escaping, anyway. Even if we managed to get out the door, the only choice left at that point would be between using our legs, which wouldn't take us far, a car we don't have the key for, and a helicopter none of us can fly.
Wrong.
Nasir is a fully qualified pilot.
??
It's a poorly repainted Royal Navy helicopter. Like all combat vehicles, it doesn't require an ignition key, and I'm quite familiar with the controls.
Well, that's perfect, then, Sergeant Turban! We're saved. All we have to do is dream that the door to our cell magically opens somehow.
And to dream, you need to sleep. Lights out in fifteen minutes.
BUT, UNSURPRISINGLY, MORTIMER CANNOT FIND SLEEP. A THOUSAND QUESTIONS SWIRLING INSIDE HIS HEAD LOOKING FOR ANSWERS HE DOESN'T HAVE ...
UNTIL SUDDENLY, AROUND THREE ...
CLACK CLACK
PROPPED UP ON ONE ELBOW, HE LOOKS TOWARDS THE DIRECTION OF THE NOISE ...
... AND DISCOVERS THE UNTHINKABLE!
??

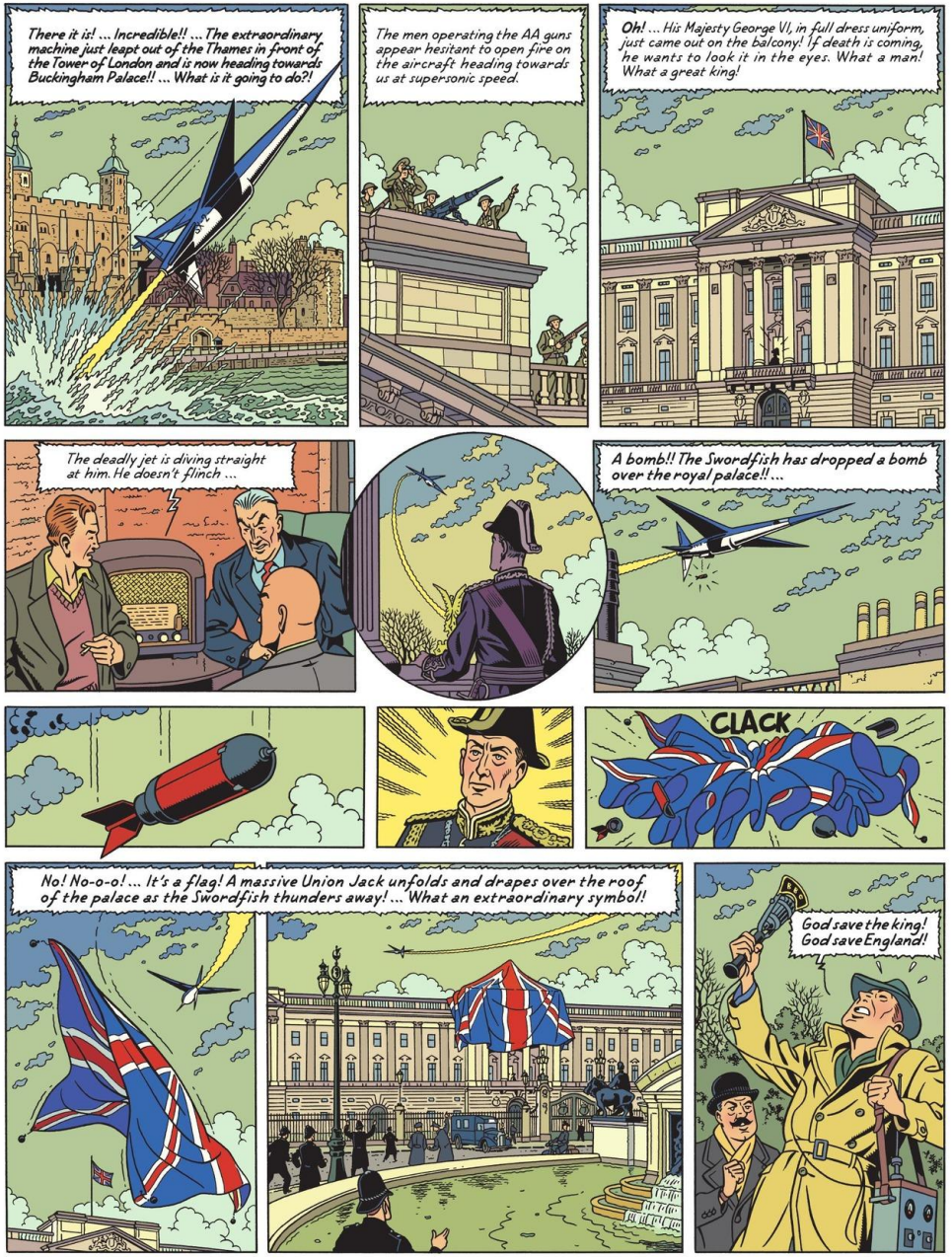

MORTIMER HAVING WOKEN UP HIS FELLOW PRISONERS, THE THREE MEN ATTEMPT TO MAKE SENSE OF THE BAFFLING SITUATION ...
What if it's a trap? I tend to be suspicious of dreams coming true ...
A trap to do what? Shoot us? If they wanted to kill us, they've had plenty of opportunities to do it simply and safely. My priority is to warn the authorities about what's coming.
AND, WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, MORTIMER BEGINS CLIMBING THE STAIRS LEADING TO THE VILLA'S GROUND FLOOR, FOLLOWED BY THE OTHER TWO.
JUST AS MIRACULOUSLY, THE HOUSE'S FRONT DOOR TURNS OUT TO BE UNLOCKED AS WELL ...
?
... WITH NO SENTRIES OUTSIDE AND THE HELICOPTER JUST THIRTY YARDS AWAY.
JUMPING INTO THE PILOT'S SEAT, NASIR QUICKLY STARTS THE ENGINE.
WIZ WIZWI
IT'S ROTOR TURNING AT MAXIMUM SPEED, THE AIRCRAFT RISES SLOWLY ...
... WHEN, ALERTED BY THE NOISE, ONE OF MILLIGAN'S SONS APPEARS AT THE VILLA'S FRONT DOOR ...
... AND FIRES A LONG BURST AT THE HELICOPTER AS IT ESCAPES INTO THE NIGHT.
TRRRATRRR-TRAAAATR

INSIDE, TENSIONS ARE RUNNING HIGH.
You opened the cellar door! You, Selfridge! It had to be you!
How am I supposed to have done that? You locked me up inside my room.
Then, who did? I didn't, and I can vouch for my sons.
Who? Who?
I did.
I opened the door for them. I wanted them to escape so that Mortimer could alert the British government that the IRA had stolen a nuclear-armed Swordfish, with the intention of launching a devastating attack ... that he has no idea when and where will take place. Tomorrow morning, our friend Milligan will anonymously tell the same thing to the BBC and the newspapers.
Imagine the chaos! People jostling for a ticket out of the country. The stock market crashing in a few hours, the entire economy in a couple of days. The government in a panic. I laugh just thinking about it!
And on the twenty-first, a few hours before the attack, the IRA will send another communiqué to the BBC informing them that something important will be happening at Buckingham Palace but without saying what exactly, of course. That way, the whole world will follow your exploits on the radio, Selfridge. You will be the most anonymous global star in history.
You should have warned us. My son wouldn't have opened fire on the helicopter.
He did well. We couldn't present our friends with too easy an escape. I know it's the middle of the night, but I think we should open a bottle of champagne to celebrate.
Is everything all right, Sergeant?
No. A bullet must have hit the oil tank. We're losing oil pressure fast.
Try to get us over the border and into Ulster, at least. It will be easier to contact Blake from British territory.
What are you planning to do with that parachute, Colonel?
Oh, if you don't mind, I thought I'd get off before we reach Ulster. Your countrymen might feel inclined to take me to task over some ... peccadillos.

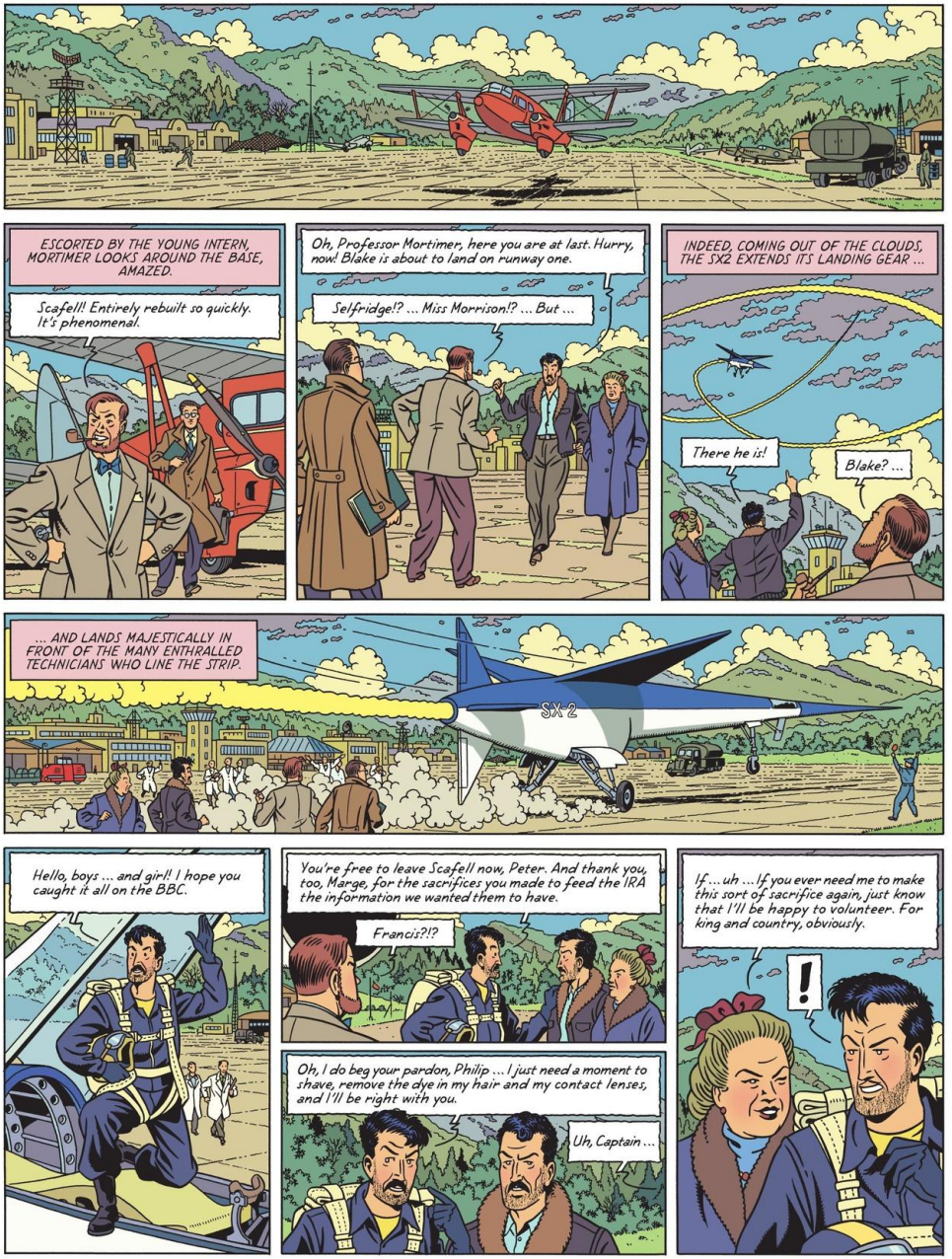

Take that off, Olrik. I am not letting go the criminal who destroyed my Swordfishes and showed no remorse at causing the death of 30 British soldiers.
I understand your point of view, Professor...
... but I still disagree with it.
By Allah, what have you done?
Leave Allah alone and take us to 1,500 feet, or I'll smash your shoulder.
I can't. We've lost almost all oil pressure. We're going to crash.
You will – not me. Climb, or it's your head I'll smash.
THE HELICOPTER HAVING REACHED AN ALTITUDE HE DEEMS SUFFICIENT, OLRIK JUMPS OUT THE DOOR.
HOLDING ONTO THE NEARLY UNRESPONSIVE CONTROLS WITH DESPERATE STRENGTH, NASIR TRIES TO DIRECT THE AIRCRAFT TOWARDS A SMALL FIR FOREST IN HOPES THE BRANCHES WILL CUSHION THE CRASH.
... IMPACT!
MEANWHILE, OLRIK MAKES A MUCH SOFTER LANDING LESS THAN A MILE FROM THE BORDER WITH ULSTER.

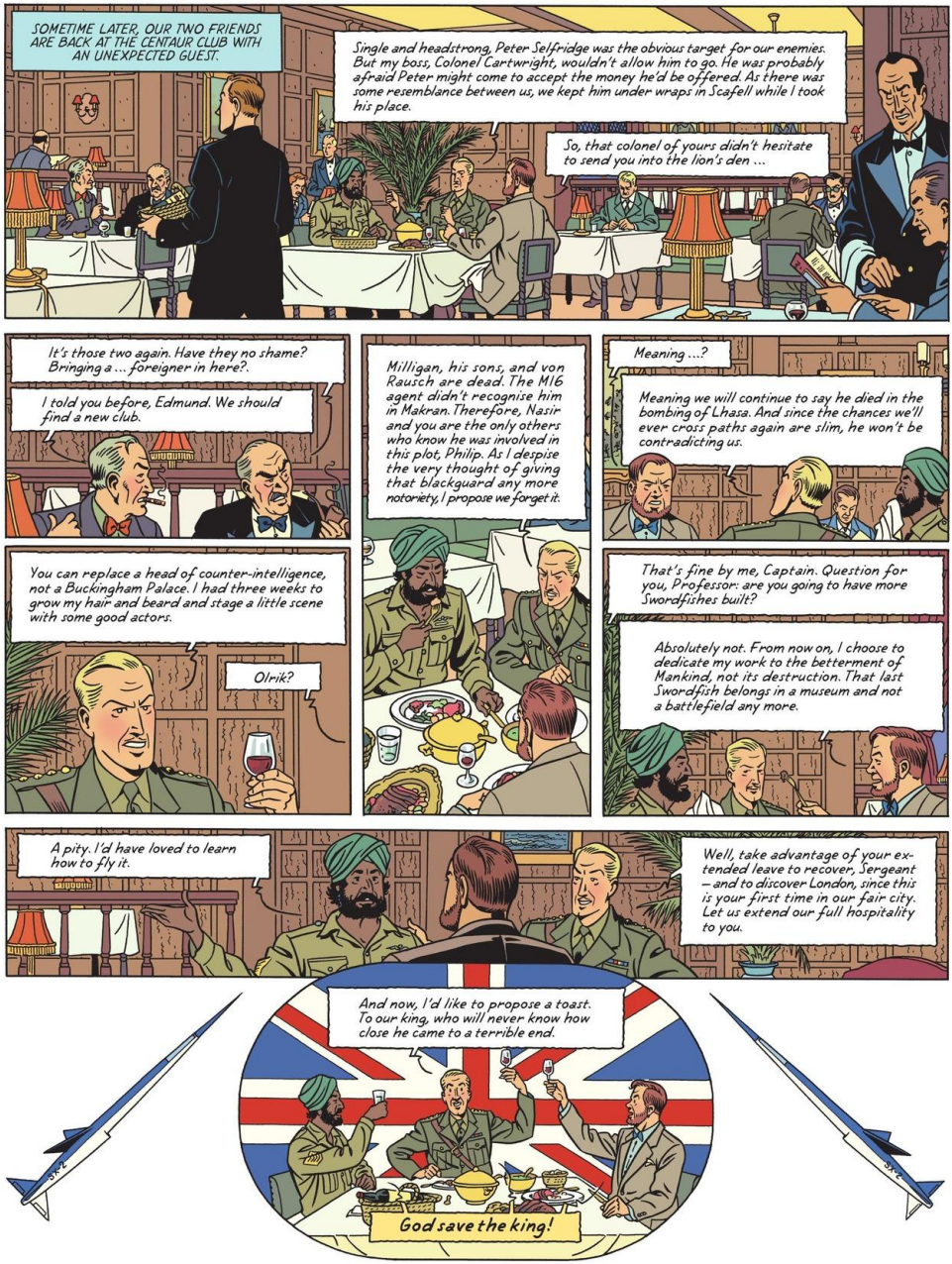

The wave of panic I was hoping for hasn't swept over England. I wonder why ...
I heard something about a helicopter that crashed on the border with Ulster. It might have been ours.
Verdammt!* Why didn't you tell me earlier? Mortimer was probably killed in the crash. That would explain the lack of reaction. You did send your communiqué to the BBC, didn't you?
Of course, Standartenführer.
The die is cast, then. H hour is in 75 minutes.
*DARN IT!
AT THAT MOMENT, SOME 130 MILES AWAY, MORTIMER WAKES UP FROM A DEEP SLEEP TO SEE AN UNKNOWN FACE LOOKING DOWN AT HIM.
Oh, finally!
Who are you? Where are we? And, more importantly, what day is this?
David Honeychurch, intern at MI5. This is the 24th of March, and we're in a hospital in Londonderry. The local police recognised you and called us. You suffered a severe concussion, and I've been waiting for you to come out of your coma for three days. Fortunately, you have no other serious injuries.
Owwww ... My head feels like a bell tower. What about Nazir?
He wasn't quite as lucky and underwent surgery for several fractures, including a serious one in his shoulder. He's under heavy sedation and must remain here.
I'm sorry to rush you, Professor, but I'm supposed to bring you to Scafell as soon as possible, where you'll meet Captain Blake. I stopped at your home and got some clothes for you from your landlady.
Blake! That's right: I need to warn him. The IRA is planning to use the Swordfish to attack ... well, I don't know what. Or when.
Today, at noon, Buckingham Palace. The IRA sent a communiqué to the BBC, though they didn't specify the nature of the attack. But don't worry. The captain has the situation well in hand. Come on. We have a plane waiting.
How can Blake have the situation in hand? We don't even know who will fly the Swordfish.
MEANWHILE, THE SX2, WITH SELFRIDGE AT THE CONTROLS, EXITS THE NARROW COVE OF THE ISLET WHERE IT'S BEEN HIDDEN AND MAKES FOR DEEP WATERS.
SX-2

THEN, IT'S REACTOR HOWLING AT FULL POWER, IT ROCKETS OUT OF THE WATER ...
... AND IN MERE MINUTES REACHES THE STRATOSPHERE, WHERE IT IS UNDETECTABLE, BEFORE HEADING FOR ENGLAND.
IN LONDON, ALERTED BY THE BBC, THE POLICE ARE HASTILY BLOCKING ALL ACCESS TO BUCKINGHAM PALACE ...
ROAD CLOSED
... WHILE THE ARMY DEPLOYS ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS IN STRATEGIC LOCATIONS.
Inspector Kendall, we were told that His Majesty George VI had his whole family evacuated, along with the palace's entire staff, but decided to remain himself, like the captain of a ship in distress. Can you confirm?
I can, and I do. Our king is a great king and proved it during the war. I do hope, however, for his sake ...
... and ours, that this provocation from the IRA is mere bluster.
Bluster! Fool! You'll see if it's bluster!
Selfridge!
SX2 to control. I'm on the 52nd parallel and over the North Sea. Commencing my dive towards the estuary. Communications will be out while I'm underwater. Tune in to the BBC for the grand finale. Over and out.
Incredible, isn't it? A terrorist attack covered live on a public radio network!
Dear listeners, I have just received surprising news. A fishing boat reported seeing a Sword-fish jet diving into the North Sea near Gravesend, where the Thames ends. One of the famous Swordfishes invented by the equally famous Professor Mortimer, which gave our pilots victory over the hordes of the tyrant Basam Damdu. Is it here to attack us or protect us?

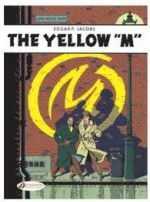

There it is! ... Incredible!! ... The extraordinary machine just leapt out of the Thames in front of the Tower of London and is now heading towards Buckingham Palace!! ... What is it going to do?!
The men operating the AA guns appear hesitant to open fire on the aircraft heading towards us at supersonic speed.
Oh! ... His Majesty George VI, in full dress uniform, just came out on the balcony! If death is coming, he wants to look it in the eyes. What a great king!
The deadly jet is diving straight at him. He doesn't flinch ...
A bomb!! The Swordfish has dropped a bomb over the royal palace!! ...
CLACK
No! No-o-o! ... It's a flag! A massive Union Jack unfolds and drapes over the roof of the palace as the Swordfish thunders away! ... What an extraordinary symbol!
God save the king! God save England!

You betrayed us, Milligan. You hired a pilot working for MI5 – and you knew it. Kill him, Hermann!
BANG
TRAAATRRR
Aah...
CLICK
CLICK
CLICK
?
BANG
BANG
No!...
Yes, you son of a swine!
BANG
Otto von Rausch? You are under arrest.
?
POLICE
Never! Heil Hitler!

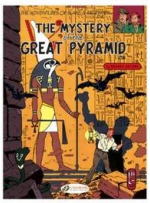

ESCORTED BY THE YOUNG INTERN, MORTIMER LOOKS AROUND THE BASE, AMAZED.
Scafell!! Entirely rebuilt so quickly. It's phenomenal.
Oh, Professor Mortimer, here you are at last. Hurry, now! Blake is about to land on runway one.
Selfridge!? ... Miss Morrison!? ... But ...
INDEED, COMING OUT OF THE CLOUDS, THE SX2 EXTENDS ITS LANDING GEAR ...
There he is!
Blake? ...
... AND LANDS MAJESTICALLY IN FRONT OF THE MANY ENTHRALLED TECHNICIANS WHO LINE THE STRIP.
SX-2
Hello, boys ... and girl! I hope you caught it all on the BBC.
You're free to leave Scafell now, Peter. And thank you, too, Marge, for the sacrifices you made to feed the IRA the information we wanted them to have.
Francis?!?
Oh, I do beg your pardon, Philip ... I just need a moment to shave, remove the dye in my hair and my contact lenses, and I'll be right with you.
Uh, Captain ...
If ... uh ... If you ever need me to make this sort of sacrifice again, just know that I'll be happy to volunteer. For king and country, obviously.
!


SOMETIME LATER, OUR TWO FRIENDS ARE BACK AT THE CENTAUR CLUB WITH AN UNEXPECTED GUEST.
Single and headstrong, Peter Selfridge was the obvious target for our enemies. But my boss, Colonel Cartwright, wouldn't allow him to go. He was probably afraid Peter might come to accept the money he'd be offered. As there was some resemblance between us, we kept him under wraps in Scafell while I took his place.
So, that colonel of yours didn't hesitate to send you into the lion's den ...
It's those two again. Have they no shame? Bringing a ... foreigner in here?.
I told you before, Edmund. We should find a new club.
Milligan, his sons, and von Rausch are dead. The MI6 agent didn't recognise him in Makran. Therefore, Nasir and you are the only others who know he was involved in this plot, Philip. As I despise the very thought of giving that blackguard any more notoriety, I propose we forget it.
Meaning ...?
Meaning we will continue to say he died in the bombing of Lhasa. And since the chances we'll ever cross paths again are slim, he won't be contradicting us.
You can replace a head of counter-intelligence, not a Buckingham Palace. I had three weeks to grow my hair and beard and stage a little scene with some good actors.
Olrik?
That's fine by me, Captain. Question for you, Professor: are you going to have more Swordfishes built?
Absolutely not. From now on, I choose to dedicate my work to the betterment of Mankind, not its destruction. That last Swordfish belongs in a museum and not a battlefield any more.
A pity. I'd have loved to learn how to fly it.
Well, take advantage of your extended leave to recover, Sergeant – and to discover London, since this is your first time in our fair city. Let us extend our full hospitality to you.
And now, I'd like to propose a toast. To our king, who will never know how close he came to a terrible end.
God save the king!

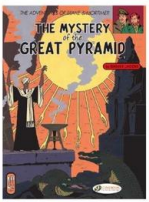
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



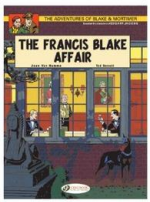
1-The Yellow "M"
EDGAR P. JACOBS



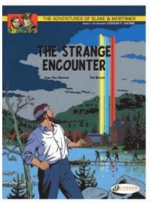
2-The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



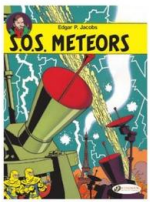
3-The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



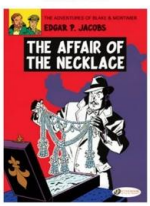
4-The Francis Blake Affair
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



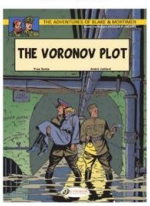
5-The Strange Encounter
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



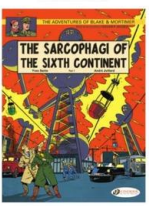
6-S.O.S. Meteors
EDGAR P. JACOBS



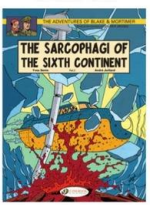
7-The Affair of the Necklace
EDGAR P. JACOBS



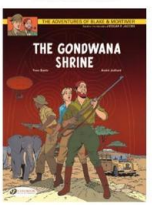
8-The Voronov Plot
SENTE - JUILLARD



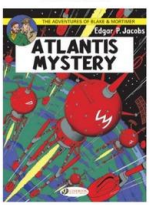
9-The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 1
SENTE - JUILLARD



10-The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 2
SENTE - JUILLARD



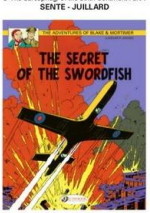
11-The Gondwana Shrine
SENTE - JUILLARD



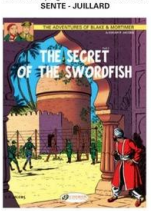
12-Atlantis Mystery
EDGAR P. JACOBS

13-The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 1
VAN HAMME - STERNE - DE SPIEGELEER

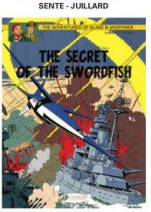
14-The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 2
VAN HAMME - AUBIN - SCHRÉDER



15-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS

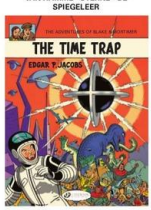


16-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS

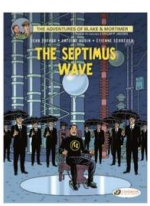


17-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 3
EDGAR P. JACOBS

18-The Oath of the Five Lords
SENTE - JUILLARD

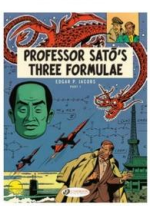


19-The Time Trap
EDGAR P. JACOBS

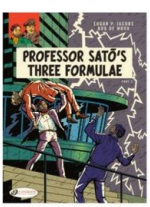


20-The Septimus Wave
DUFAUX - AUBIN - SCHRÉDER

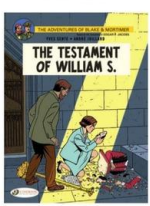
21-Plutarch's Staff
SENTE - JUILLARD



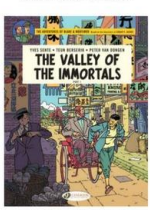
22-Professor Satô's Three Formulae Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



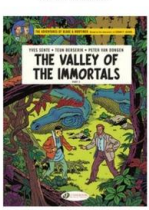
23-Professor Satô's Three Formulae Part 2
JACOBS - DE MOOR



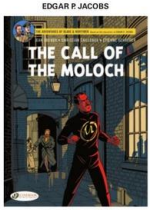
24-The Testament of William S.
SENTE - JUILLARD



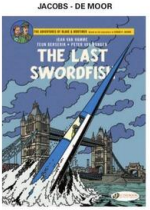
25-The Valley of the Immortals Part 1
SENTE - BERSERIK - VAN DONGEN



26-The Valley of the Immortals Part 2
SENTE - BERSERIK - VAN DONGEN



27-The Call of the Moloch
DUFAUX - CAILLEAUX - SCHRÉDER

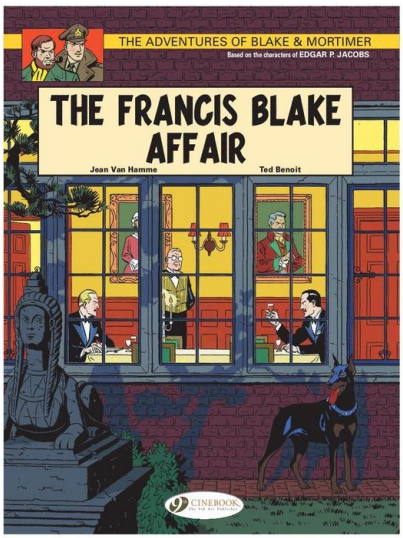


28-The Last Swordfish
VAN HAMME - BERSERIK - VAN DONGEN

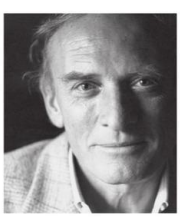
THE FRANCIS BLAKE AFFAIR

Jean Van Hamme **Ted Benoit**

Based on the characters of **EDGAR P. JACOBS**

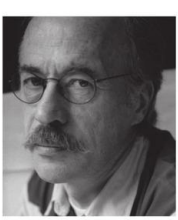


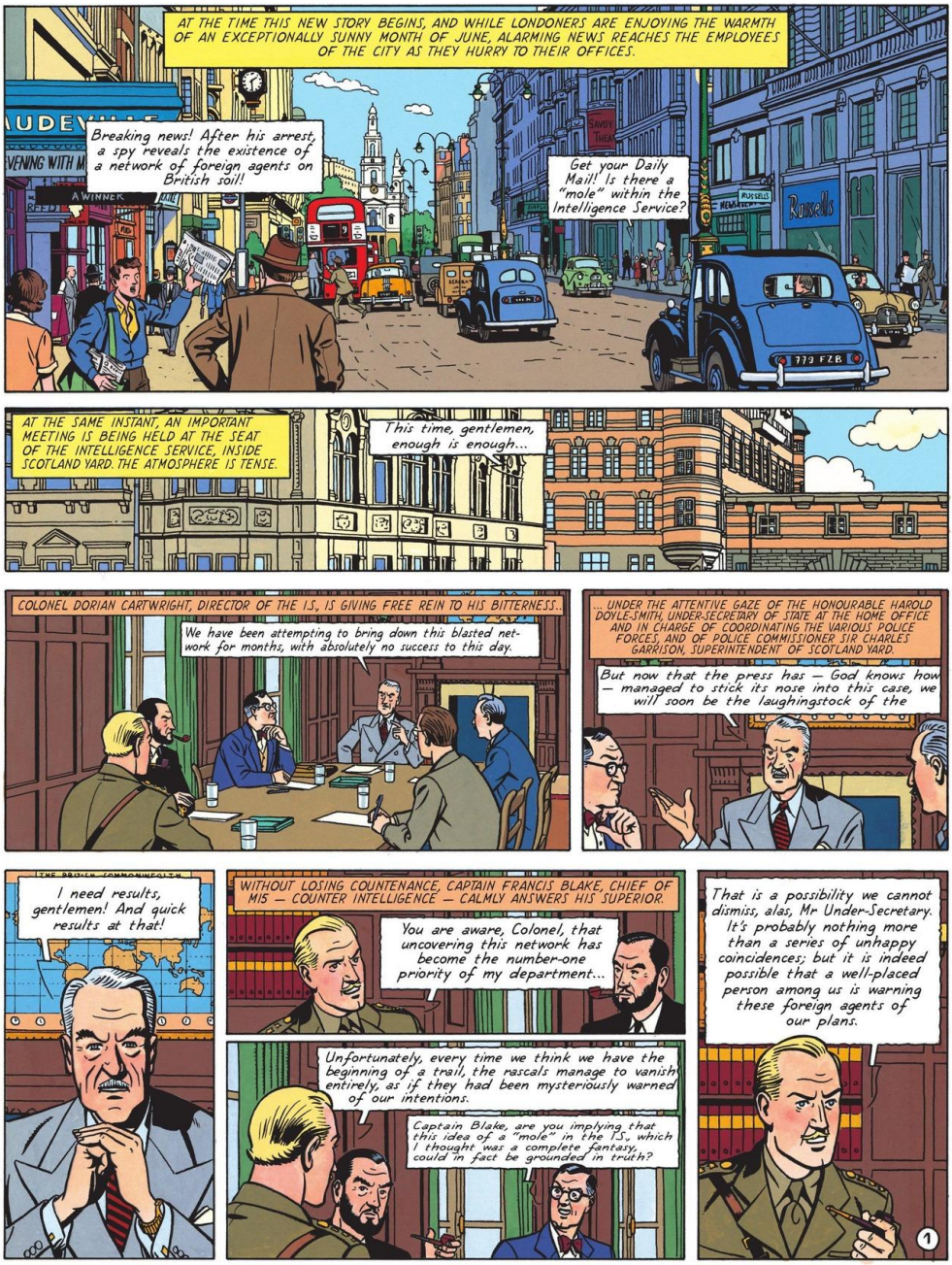
Scandal breaks in the London press: There is a mole in the Intelligence Service! And it appears without a doubt, in a photograph taken by agents of MI5, that the mole wears the face of Francis Blake! Mortimer is determined to believe that his friend has been forced to act against his will. But the initial investigations sweep away this hypothesis: Blake has opened, under an assumed name, an account fed by payments coming from the Bahamas. In a few months, he has withdrawn £30,000—more than 10 times his annual pay!



Jean **Van Hamme** is one of Belgium's most successful contemporary novelists and comics writers. His most popular successes are Thorgal (illustrated by **Rosinski**), Largo Winch (illustrated by **Francq**), Lady S (illustrated by **Aymond**) and XIII (illustrated by **Vance**), all translated and published in English by Cinebook. In 2005, he was appointed "Officier des Arts et des Lettres" by the French Minister of Culture.

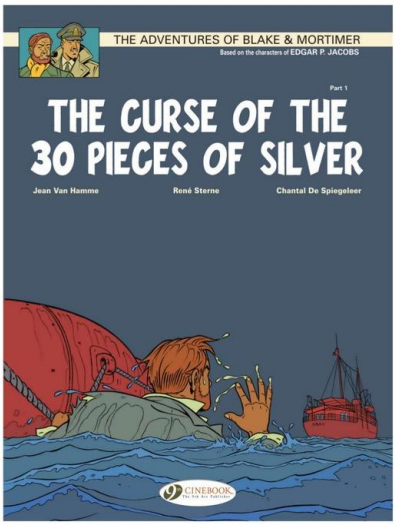
The artist Ted **Benoit** is a big admirer and supporter of the Clear Line graphic style instituted by **Hergé** and E. P. **Jacobs**. His work is described simply as a combination of extravagance, meticulousness and intelligence. For over 30 years Ted **Benoit** has been creating work of surprisingly powerful simplicity, from the "Vers la Ligne Claire" collection in 1979 to the "Un Nouveau Monde" collection published in 2006.



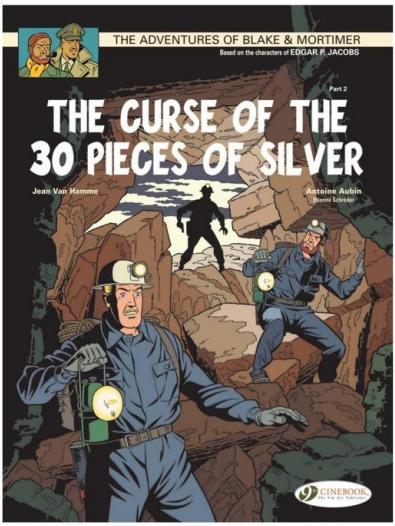

AT THE TIME THIS NEW STORY BEGINS, AND WHILE LONDONERS ARE ENJOYING THE WARMTH OF AN EXCEPTIONALLY SUNNY MONTH OF JUNE, ALARMING NEWS REACHES THE EMPLOYEES OF THE CITY AS THEY HURRY TO THEIR OFFICES.
Breaking news! After his arrest, a spy reveals the existence of a network of foreign agents on British soil!
Get your Daily Mail! Is there a "mole" within the Intelligence Service?
AT THE SAME INSTANT, AN IMPORTANT MEETING IS BEING HELD AT THE SEAT OF THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, INSIDE SCOTLAND YARD. THE ATMOSPHERE IS TENSE.
This time, gentlemen, enough is enough...
COLONEL DORIAN CARTWRIGHT, DIRECTOR OF THE I.S, IS GIVING FREE REIN TO HIS BITTERNESS..
We have been attempting to bring down this blasted network for months, with absolutely no success to this day.
... UNDER THE ATTENTIVE GAZE OF THE HONOURABLE HAROLD DOYLE-SMITH, UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE AT THE HOME OFFICE AND IN CHARGE OF COORDINATING THE VARIOUS POLICE FORCES, AND OF POLICE COMMISSIONER SIR CHARLES GARRISON, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCOTLAND YARD.
But now that the press has — God knows how — managed to stick its nose into this case, we will soon be the laughingstock of the
I need results, gentlemen! And quick results at that!
WITHOUT LOSING COUNTENANCE, CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE, CHIEF OF MI5 — COUNTER INTELLIGENCE — CALMLY ANSWERS HIS SUPERIOR.
You are aware, Colonel, that uncovering this network has become the number-one priority of my department...
Unfortunately, every time we think we have the beginning of a trail, the rascals manage to vanish entirely, as if they had been mysteriously warned of our intentions.
Captain Blake, are you implying that this idea of a "mole" in the I.S., which I thought was a complete fantasy, could in fact be grounded in truth?
That is a possibility we cannot dismiss, alas, Mr Under-Secretary. It's probably nothing more than a series of unhappy coincidences; but it is indeed possible that a well-placed person among us is warning these foreign agents of our plans.
1

THE CURSE OF THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER

Based on the characters of **EDGAR P. JACOBS**



The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 1



The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 2

FOR BLAKE AND MORTIMER, THE SEARCH FOR JUDAS'S GRAVE LEADS STRAIGHT TO ... HELL!

In Pennsylvania, Olrik escapes a federal prison by helicopter after a bloody attack. With Blake forced to cut short his holidays at the news, a disappointed Mortimer turns his attention to Greece, where an earthquake has uncovered an ancient chapel. Before long, people are trying to kill Mortimer over a mysterious Roman silver coin. Could the long-lost relic be one of the 30 denarii paid to Judas for his betrayal of Jesus? And who exactly covets it so much?

FOLLOWING A RELATIVELY WEAK EARTHQUAKE, A YOUNG GOATHERD DISCOVERED THE RUINS OF A FIFTH-CENTURY CHRISTIAN CHAPEL ON THE MANI PENINSULA, THE SOUTHERNMOST PART OF THE PELOPONNESE.

?

INSIDE, IN ADDITION TO SOME MARVELLOUS FRESCOES, WAS A MANUSCRIPT FROM ONE NICODEMUS. WRITTEN IN ARAMAIC ON LEATHER SCROLLS, IT TOLD THE STORY OF A SMALL CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION'S FLIGHT AFTER THE BURNING OF ROME IN 64 AD, AND OF HOW ITS MEMBERS SETTLED ON ONE OF THE GREEK ISLANDS.

THERE WAS ALSO, WITHIN A LEAD RELIQUARY, A SILVER COIN BEARING THE PORTRAIT OF EMPEROR TIBERIUS. ACCORDING TO NICODEMUS'S WRITINGS, IT WAS ONE OF THE 30 DENARII GIVEN TO JUDAS ISCARIOT BY THE PRIESTS OF THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON FOR HANDING JESUS OVER TO THE ROMANS.

STILL ACCORDING TO THE MANUSCRIPT, THE RENEGADE APOSTLE'S ATTEMPT TO COMMIT SUICIDE HAD FAILED AND, AFTER WANDERING FOR A LONG TIME, HE HAD COME TO SPEND HIS LAST DAYS AMONG NICODEMUS'S COMMUNITY. HE WAS THEN BURIED IN AN UNKNOWN LOCATION WITH HIS REMAINING 29 PIECES OF SILVER.

DR MARKOPOULOS, CHIEF CURATOR OF THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF ATHENS, AND HIS ASSISTANT AND NIECE ELENI, CALLED UPON PHILIP MORTIMER—WHOSE REPUTATION AS AN AMATEUR ARCHAEOLOGIST EXTENDS WELL BEYOND THE BORDERS OF GREAT-BRITAIN—TO HELP THEM SOLVE THE MYSTERY.

MEANWHILE, IN THE UNITED STATES, A MYSTERIOUS HELICOPTER-BORNE COMMANDO GROUP BROKE "COLONEL" OLRIK OUT OF THE PENITENTIARY WHERE HE'D BEEN SERVING HIS TIME SINCE THE BUSINESS WITH THE LOS ALAMOS ATOMIC BOMBS*. THE ASSISTANCE OF CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE, COMMANDER OF MI5, WAS REQUESTED BY HIS OLD FRIEND JOHN CALLOWAY, HEAD OF THE FBI'S OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON.

BUT OLRIK WAS ALREADY FAR AWAY, SAILING THE ATLANTIC ON BOARD THE ARAX. THE YACHT BELONGED TO BELOS BELUKIAN, A FABULOUSLY WEALTHY ARMENIAN BUSINESSMAN WHO'D HAD OLRIK FREED IN ORDER TO RECRUIT HIM. BELUKIAN WAS, IN FACT, COUNT RAINER VON STAHL, A FORMER SS OFFICER WHO VANISHED DURING THE COLLAPSE OF NAZI GERMANY IN 1945—AFTER APPROPRIATING THE NAZI WAR TREASURE THAT ADOLF HITLER HAD ORDERED HIM TO HIDE IN AUSTRIA.

VON STAHL'S GOAL WAS TO BE THE FIRST TO FIND JUDAS'S GRAVE AND TAKE THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER FOR HIMSELF. HE BELIEVED THEY WERE FILLED WITH AN EVIL POWER THAT WOULD ALLOW HIM TO RULE OVER THE WORLD. DESPITE A CERTAIN SCEPTICISM, OLRIK AGREED TO ENTER HIS SERVICE, AS MUCH OUT OF GREED AS BECAUSE THE PROSPECT OF ONCE AGAIN FACING HIS OLD ENEMY MORTIMER APPEALED TO HIM.

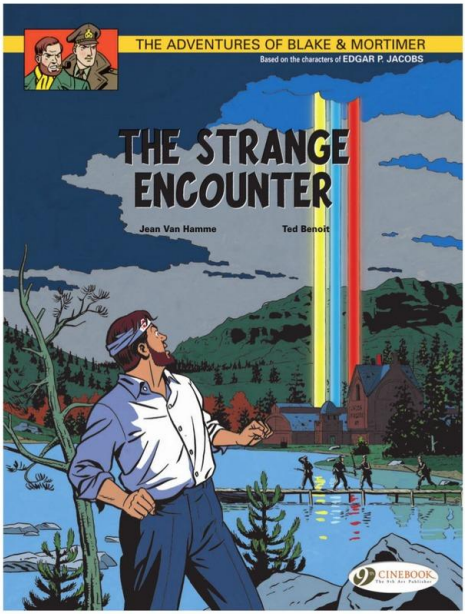
1

*SEE THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER.

THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER

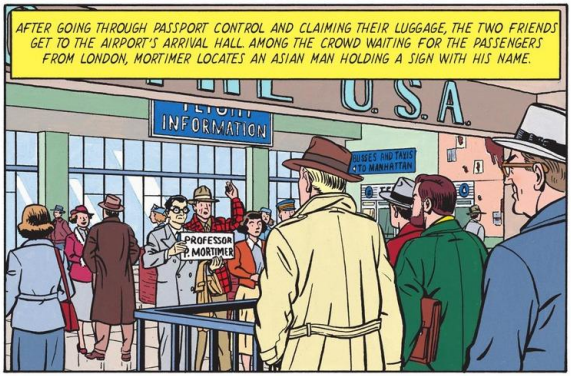
Jean Van Hamme Ted Benoit

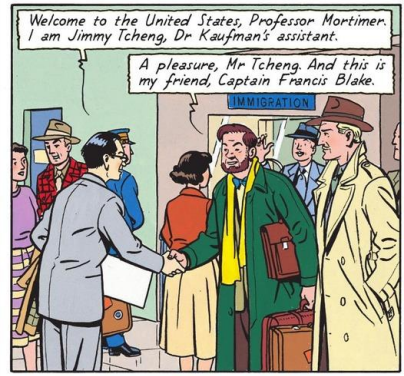
Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

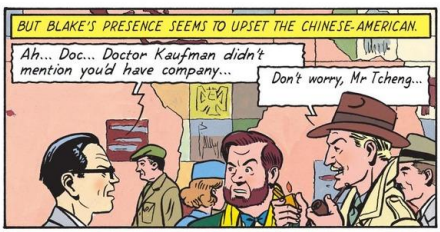


THE TWO GENTLEMEN-SPIES TRAVEL TO AMERICA AND TAKE ON A 177-YEAR-OLD EVIL

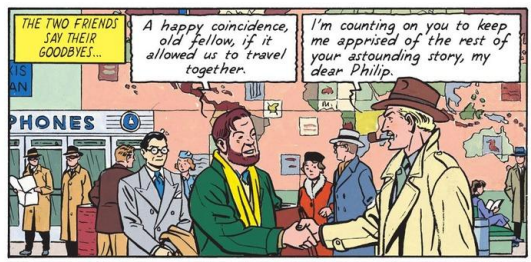
Blake and Mortimer head to the United States to investigate the mysterious circumstances surrounding the discovery of a 177-year-old body, which appears to have died very recently. The body is that of a Scottish major, Mortimer's forebear, who was leading a British military expedition to the US in 1777, where he was swallowed up by a strange multi-coloured light-beam shining down from the sky. Blake and Mortimer fight men in black armed with green-laser guns and soldiers emerging from the past in order to save the Earth from complete obliteration.

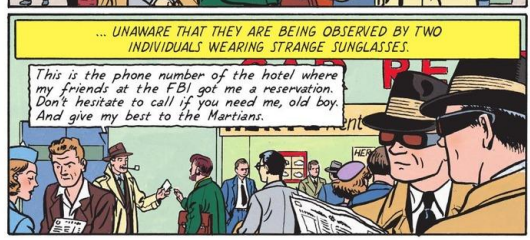

AFTER GOING THROUGH PASSPORT CONTROL AND CLAIMING THEIR LUGGAGE, THE TWO FRIENDS GET TO THE AIRPORT'S ARRIVAL HALL. AMONG THE CROWD WAITING FOR THE PASSENGERS FROM LONDON, MORTIMER LOCATES AN ASIAN MAN HOLDING A SIGN WITH HIS NAME.
U.S.A.
INFORMATION
BUSES AND TAXIS TO MANHATTAN
PROFESSOR P. MORTIMER


Welcome to the United States, Professor Mortimer. I am Jimmy Tcheng, Dr Kaufman's assistant.
A pleasure, Mr Tcheng. And this is my friend, Captain Francis Blake.
IMMIGRATION


BUT BLAKE'S PRESENCE SEEMS TO UPSET THE CHINESE-AMERICAN.
Ah... Doc... Doctor Kaufman didn't mention you'd have company...
Don't worry, Mr Tcheng...

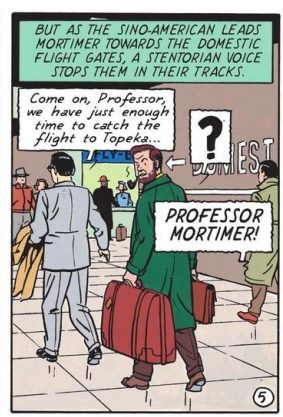
... My presence on this flight with the professor is no more than a coincidence. I'm here to take part in a routine meeting with my colleagues in Washington.


THE TWO FRIENDS SAY THEIR GOODBYES...
A happy coincidence, old fellow, if it allowed us to travel together.
I'm counting on you to keep me apprised of the rest of your astounding story, my dear Philip.
PHONES


... UNAWARE THAT THEY ARE BEING OBSERVED BY TWO INDIVIDUALS WEARING STRANGE SUNGLASSES.
This is the phone number of the hotel where my friends at the FBI got me a reservation. Don't hesitate to call if you need me, old boy. And give my best to the Martians.

WHILE HIS PARTNER KEEPS AN EYE ON OUR FRIENDS, ONE OF THE MEN HAS SLIPPED INTO A PHONE BOOTH AND DIALLED A MYSTERIOUS NUMBER.
A certain Captain Blake is with him... He mentioned the FBI...
By the Devil! If Blake is here, then it's because he's got wind of something. He must be eliminated. Here are my instructions...

I suppose you will be flying to Washington?
Oh, no! Enough flying for me! I'd rather drive there. That way I'll get to enjoy the scenery. Have a nice day, Mr Tcheng!
DOMESTIC FLIGHTS


BUT AS THE SINO-AMERICAN LEADS MORTIMER TOWARDS THE DOMESTIC FLIGHT GATES, A STENTORIAN VOICE STOPS THEM IN THEIR TRACKS.
Come on, Professor, we have just enough time to catch the flight to Topeka...
?
PROFESSOR MORTIMER!
5

Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo, Tintin in America, King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn/Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls/Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine Tintin was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with new teams of writers and artists.

ORIGINAL FRENCH EDITION		
1	1950	Le secret de l'Espadon, T1
2	1953	Le secret de l'Espadon, T2
3	1953	Le secret de l'Espadon, T3
4	1954	Le mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1
5	1955	Le mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2
6	1956	La marque Jaune
7	1957	L'énigme de l'Atlantide
8	1959	S.O.S. Météores
9	1962	Le piège diabolique
10	1967	L'affaire du collier
11	1971	Les trois formules du professeur Satô, T1
12	1990	Les trois formules du professeur Satô, T2 (Jacobs/De Moor)
13	1996	L'affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit)
14	2000	La machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard)
15	2001	L'étrange rendez-vous (Van Hamme/Benoit)
16	2003	Les sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard)
17	2004	Les sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard)
18	2008	Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard)
19	2009	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T1 (Van Hamme/Sterne/De Spiegeleer)
20	2010	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T2 (Van Hamme/Aubin)
21	2012	Le serment des cinq Lords (Sente/Juillard)
22	2013	L'onde Septimus (Dufaux/Aubin/Schréder)
23	2014	Le bâton de Plutarque (Sente/Juillard)
24	2016	Le Testament de William S. (Sente/Juillard)
25	2018	La Vallée des Immortels, T1 (Sente/Berserik/Van Dongen)
26	2019	La Vallée des Immortels, T2 (Sente/Berserik/Van Dongen)
27	2020	Le cri du Moloch (Dufaux/Cailleaux/Schréder)
28	2021	Le Dernier Espadon (Van Hamme/Berserik/Van Dongen)

CINEBOOK EDITION		
15	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 1
16	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 2
17	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 3
2	2007	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1
3	2008	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2
1	2007	The Yellow "M"
12	2012	Atlantis Mystery
6	2009	S.O.S. Meteors
19	2014	The Time Trap
7	2010	The Affair of the Necklace
22	2016	Professor Satôs Three Formulae, Part 1
23	2016	Professor Satôs Three Formulae, Part 2
4	2008	The Francis Blake Affair
8	2010	The Voronov Plot
5	2009	The Strange Encounter
9	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1
10	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2
11	2011	The Gondwana Shrine
13	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 1
14	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 2
18	2014	The Oath of the Five Lords
20	2015	The Septimus Wave
21	2015	Plutarch's Staff
24	2016	The Testament of William S.
25	2018	The Valley of the Immortals, Part 1
26	2019	The Valley of the Immortals, Part 2
27	2020	The Call of the Moloch
28	2021	The Last Swordfish

MAGIC MAN

DCP